

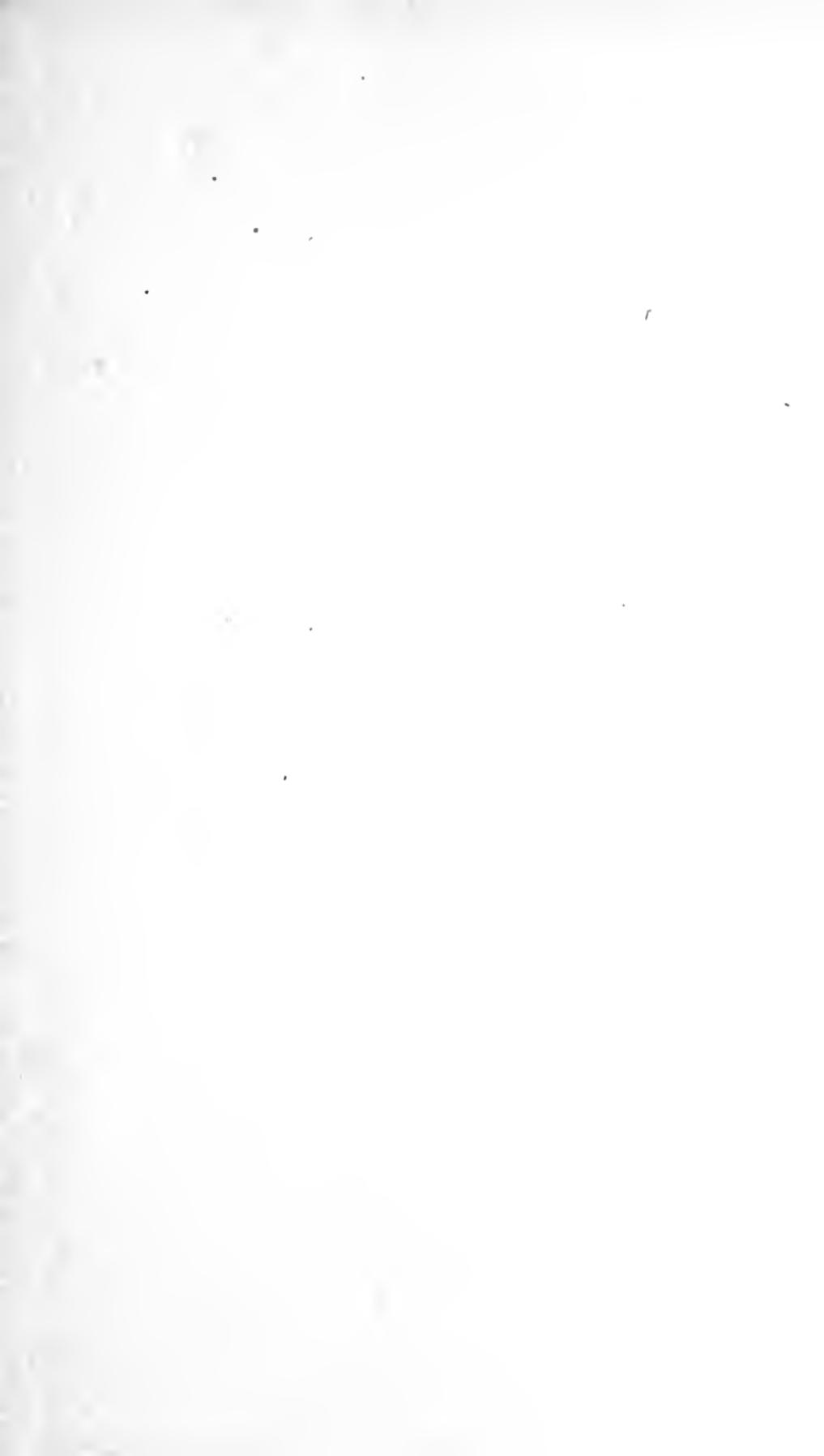
ERIS

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THE BETTER MAN	IN THE QUARTER
POLICE!!!	
SOME LADIES IN HASTE	
OUTSIDERS	

ERIS

BY

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

AUTHOR OF "THE FLAMING JEWEL," "THE LITTLE RED
FOOT," "THE SLAYER OF SOULS," "IN SECRET,"
"THE COMMON LAW," ETC.

HODDER & STOUGHTON
LIMITED : : LONDON

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BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY



ERIS. I

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO
MY FRIEND
HARRY PAYNE BURTON



E R I S

E R I S

CHAPTER I

THE baby was born at Whitewater Farms about nine in the morning, April 19, 1900. Two pure-breed calves,—one a heifer, the other a bull,—were dropped the same day at nearly the same hour.

Odell came in toward noon, heard these farm items from his foreman, Ed Lister.

For twenty years Odell's marriage had been childless. He had waited in vain for a son,—for several sons,—and now, after twenty sterile years of hardship, drudgery, and domestic discord, Fanny had given him a girl.

He stood in silence, chewing the bitter news.

“Awright,” he said, “that's *that!* Is Queen doin' good?”

Whitewater Queen was doing as well as could be expected and her fourth heifer calf was a miracle of Guernsey beauty.

“Awright! Veal that danged bull-caaf. That's White Chief's second bull outa White Rose. I'm done. We'll take her to Hilltop Acres next time. And that's *that!*”

He dusted the fertiliser and land plaster from his patched canvas jacket:

“It blowed some,” he said. “I oughta waited. Cost me five dollars, mebbe. I thought it might rain; that's why. It's one dum thing after another. It allus comes like that.”

He scraped the bottom of his crusted boots against the concrete rim of the manure pit.

A bitter winter with practically no snow; dry swamps; an April drouth; a disastrous run of bull calves with no market,—and now, after twenty years, a girl baby!

How was a man going to get ahead? How was he to break even? Twenty years Odell had waited for sons to help him. He should have had three or four at work by this time. Instead he was paying wages.

"I guess Fanny's kinda bad," remarked the foreman.

Odell looked up from his brooding study of the manure.

"I dunno," continued the foreman; "another Doc is here, too. He come with a train nurse n'hour ago. Looks kinda bad to me, Elmer."

Odell gazed stupidly at Lister.

"What other Doc?" he demanded.

"Old Doc Benson. Doc Wand sent Mazie for him."

Odell said nothing. After a moment or two he walked slowly toward the house.

In the kitchen a neighbour, one Susan Hagan, a gross widow, was waddling around getting dinner, perspiring and garrulous. Two or three farm hands, in bantering conversation, stood washing or drying their faces at the sink.

Mazie, the big, buxom daughter of Ed Lister, moved leisurely about, setting the table. She was laughing, as usual, at the men's repartee.

But when Odell appeared the clatter of the roller-towel ceased. So did Mazie's laughter and the hired men's banter.

Mrs. Hagan was the first to recover her tongue:

"Now, Elmer," she began in unctuous tones, "you set right down here and eat a mite o' ham——" She already had him by the sleeve of his canvas jacket. She grasped a smoking fry-pan in the other hand. The smoke from it blew into Odell's face.

"Leggo," he grunted, jerking his arm free.

Mrs. Hagan encountered Mazie's slanting black eyes, narrow with derision:

"Elmer don't want to eat; he wants to see Fanny," said

Mazie Lister. And added: "Your ham's burning, Mrs. Hagan."

"Where's Doc Wand?" demanded Odell heavily.

Mrs. Hagan savagely snatched the answer from Mazie's red lips:

"Oh, Elmer," she burst out, "he's went and called in old Doc Benson; and Benson he fetched a train nurse from Summit——" Smoke from the burning ham strangled her. Odell left her coughing, and strode toward the sitting room.

"Dang it!" he muttered, "what next!"

It was cool and dusky in the sitting room. He halted in the golden gloom, sullenly apprehensive, listening for any sound from the bed-room overhead.

After a little while Dr. Wand came downstairs. He was haggard and white, but when he caught sight of Odell he went to him with a smile. The village folk feared and trusted Dr. Wand. They feared his sarcasm and trusted his skill. But, with the self-assertion of inferiority, they all called him "Fred" or "Doc."

"Well, Elmer," he said, "the baby's doing nicely. . . . I thought I'd like to have Dr. Benson look at Fanny. . . . A fine baby, Elmer. . . . Fanny asked me to think up some uncommon and pretty name for your little girl——"

"Name her anything," said Odell thickly. . . . "Dang it, I waited twenty years for a boy. And now look what I get! It all comes to once. White Rose drops me a bull-caaf, too. But I can veal *that!*"

"Better luck next time——"

"No," he interrupted fiercely, "I'm done!" He turned and stared at the sun-bars on the lowered shade, his tanned features working.

"It's like the herd," he said. "Either the cow or the herd-bull's to blame for every dinged bull caaf. And I can't afford to breed 'em together more'n twice. . . . Twenty years I been lookin' for a boy, Doc. No, I'm done. And that's that!"

"You'd better go and eat," suggested the doctor.

Odell nodded: "Fanny awright?"

"We're watching her. Perhaps you'd better stay around this afternoon, Elmer——"

"I gotta spread manure——"

"I want you within calling distance," repeated the doctor mildly.

Odell looked up. After a moment's hesitation:

"Awright, Doc. I guess I can work around nearby. You must be dead-beat. Eat a snack with us?"

"Not now. I can't leave your wife."

"Do you mean that Fanny's kinda bad?"

"Yes. . . . Your wife is very, very ill, Elmer. Dr. Benson is with her now."

Breaking ground for a new kitchen garden that afternoon, Odell found the soil so infested with quack-root, horse-radish, and parsnip that he gave it up and told Lister that they'd fence the place as cheaply as possible and turn the hogs on it.

Lister hooked up a horse and drove away to hunt for locust posts and wire. Odell dragged his plow to the wagon shed, stabled the fat gray horse, walked slowly back toward the wood shed. There was a dead apple tree he could fell while waiting.

It was very still there in the April sunshine. All signs of rain were gone. The wind had died out. Save for the hum of bees in crocus and snow-drop, and except for the white cock's clarion from the runs, no sound broke the blue silence of an April afternoon.

Odell looked up at the window of his wife's bed-room. The white-capped nurse was seated there, her head turned as though intent upon something taking place within the room. She did not stir. After a while Odell picked up his spading fork and wiped the tines.

Yes, every kind of bad luck was coming at once; drouth,

bull calves, wind to waste fertiliser, doctors' bills, expenses for a nurse, for Mrs. Hagan, for posts and wire,—and the land riddled with quack and horse-radish. . . .

He'd about broken even, so far, during the last twenty years. All these years he'd marked time, doggedly, plugging away. Because, after all, there had been nothing else to do. He could not stop. To sell meant merely to begin again somewhere else, plug away, break about even year after year, die plugging. That was what general farming meant in White Hills when there were wages to pay. He could have made money with sons to help him. . . . Life was a tread-mill. What his cattle took from the land they gave back; nothing more. He was tired of the tread-mill. A squirrel in a cage travelled no further and got as far. . . .

Odell drove his spading fork into the ground, sifted out fragments of horse-radish roots, kicked them under the fence into the dusty road beyond.

Dr. Wand's roadster stood out there by the front gate. Behind it waited Dr. Benson's driver in the new limousine car. Odell had not felt he could afford any kind of car,—not even a tractor. These danged doctors. . . .

As he stood with one foot resting on his spading fork, gazing gloomily at the two cars, Dr. Benson, fat, ruddy and seventy, came out of the house with his satchel.

He nodded to Odell:

"Dr. Wand wants you," he said. "She's conscious."

After the portly physician had driven away down the dusty road, Odell went into the house and ascended the stairs to the common bed-room from which now, in all probability, he was to be excluded for a while.

Dr. Wand, beside the bed, very tired, motioned Odell to draw nearer. It was the ghost of his wife he saw lying there.

"Well," he grunted with an effort, "you don't feel very spry, I guess. You look kinda peekid, Fan."

All the stored resentment of twenty barren years glittered

in his wife's sunken eyes. She knew his desire for sons. She knew what he now thought of her.

She said in a distinct voice to Dr. Ward: "Tell him."

The doctor said: "Your wife has asked me to think up some new and unusual name for the baby. I suggested 'Eris,'" he added blandly. And, after a silence: "Your wife seems to like the name."

Odell nodded: "Awright."

His wife said to the doctor, in her painfully distinct voice: "I want she should have a name that no other baby's got. . . . Because—that's all I can give her. . . . Something no other baby's got. . . . Write it, Doctor."

Dr. Ward wrote "Eris" on the birth certificate. His expression became slightly ironical.

"Eris," he repeated. "Do you both approve this name?"

Odell shrugged assent.

"Yes," said the woman. "She's mine. All I can give her is this name. *I give it.*"

"Eris was the name of a Greek goddess," remarked the doctor. He did not explain that Eris was the goddess of Discord. "I'm very sure," he added, "that no other baby is named Eris. . . . But plenty of 'em ought to be. . . . Was there anything you wanted to say to your wife, Elmer?"

"Hey?" demanded Odell, stupidly.

Suddenly something in the physician's eyes sent a dull shock through Odell. He turned and stared at his wife as though he had never before laid eyes on her. After a while he found his voice:

"You—you'll get better after a spell," he stammered. "Feel like eatin' a mite o' sunthin' tasty? You want I should get you a little jell 'rsunthin'—Fanny—"

Her bright, sunken gaze checked him.

"You ain't asked to see the baby," she said in her thin, measured voice; "I'm sorry I ever bore a child to you, Elmer."

Odell reddened: "Where is it——?" He stumbled up

from his chair, looking vaguely about him, confused by her brilliant eyes—by their measureless resentment.

For life was becoming too brief for pretence now. Fanny knew it; her husband began to realise it.

She said: “I’m *glad* I have no sons. I’m sorry I bore a child. . . . God forgive me. . . . Because I’ll never rest, never be quiet, now. . . . But I don’t mind so much . . . if **THEY** will let me keep an eye on her somehow——” She tried to lift her head from the pillow: “I want to see her,” she said sharply.

“Yes,” said the doctor. “I want you to see her. Wait a moment——”

As he passed Odell he drew him outside. “Go downstairs,” he whispered. “I’ll call you if she asks to see you again.”

“She ain’t a-goin’ to get no better?” demanded Odell hoarsely.

“No.”

The physician passed on into the adjoining room, where the nurse sat watching a new-born baby in its brand new cradle.

Odell continued down the stairs, and seated himself in the dim sitting room. . . .

Everything was coming at once—drouth, wind, bull calves, girl babies—and Death. . . . All were coming at once. . . . But no sons had ever come. None would ever come now. So—wages must go on. . . . A woman to mind the baby. . . . And somebody to keep house for him. . . . Expense piling on expense. And no outlook—no longer any chance to break even. . . . Where was he to get more money? He could not carry the farm on his own shoulders all alone. The more work planned, the more men needed; and the more it all cost. Increased acreage, redoubled production, got him no further. Always it was, at best, merely an even break—every loss offsetting every gain. . . .

One of the cats came in with a barn rat hanging from her mouth, looked furtively at Odell, then slunk out, tail twitching.

The man dropped his elbows on the centre table and took his unshaven face between both scarred fists. . . .

The room had grown as still as death now. Which was fitting and proper.

After a long while Dr. Wand descended the stairs. Odell stood up in the semi-dusk of the sitting room.

"She didn't ask for you again," said the doctor.

"Is—is she—gone?"

"Yes. . . . Quite painlessly."

They walked slowly to the porch. It was nearly milking time. The herd was coming up the long lane,—the sun dipping low behind,—and a delicate rosy light over everything.

"You got your milking to do," said the doctor. "I'll notify Wilbur Chase. I'll see to everything, Elmer."

Wilbur Chase was the local undertaker. The doctor went out to the road, cranked his car, got in wearily, and rolled away toward the village.

Odell stood motionless. In his ears sounded the cow-bells, tonk-a-tonk, tonk-a-tonk, as the Whitewater herd turned leisurely into the barn yard. Ed Lister opened the sliding doors to the cow-barn. A frisky heifer or two balked; otherwise the herd went in soberly, filing away behind spotless, sweet-smelling rows of stalls, greeted thunderously by the great herd-bull from his steel bull-pen.

Odell, heavy-eyed, turned on his heel and went upstairs.

But at the door of the silent room above the nurse barred his way.

"I'll let you know when you can see her," she said. "She isn't ready."

Odell gazed at her in a bewildered way.

"The baby is in the other room," added the nurse. "Don't wake her. Better not touch her."

He went, obediently, stood in the doorway, his scarred hands hanging.

Eris lay asleep in her brand new cradle, almost invisible under the white fabrics that swathed her.

The chamber of death was no stiller than this dim room where life was beginning. There was no sound, no light except a long, rosy ray from the setting sun falling athwart the cradle.

So slept Eris, daughter of discord, and so named,—an unwelcome baby born late in her parents' lives, and opening her blind, bluish eyes like an April wind-flower in a world still numb from winter.

Odell stared at the mound of covers.

It would be a long while before this baby could be of any use at Whitewater Farms.

CHAPTER II

IT is a long lane that has no turning, either for cattle or for men.

When Fanny died Odell was forty. Two months later he married the strapping daughter of Ed Lister. And came to the turn in the long, long lane he had travelled for twenty years.

For, as Whitewater Queen was a breeder of heifer calves, Mazie Lister proved to be a breeder of men.

Every year, for the first four years, she gave Odell a son.

There was no fuss made about these events. Mazie Lister was the kind of girl who could eat cabbage for breakfast, wad it down with pie, drive it deeper with a quart of buttermilk.

Once, to prove she could do it, she ate a whole roast sucking pig, five boiled potatoes, six ears of corn, a dish of cranberry sauce, and an entire apple pie; and washed it down with three quarts of new cider.

Her feed never fattened her; it seemed to make her skin pinker, teeth whiter, long, slanting black eyes more brilliant.

No cares worried her. She laughed a great deal. She was busy from dawn to dark. Unfatigued but sleepy, she yawned frightfully toward nine o'clock. It was her time to roost.

Mazie's instincts concerning progeny were simple. She nursed each arrival as long as necessary, then weaned it. Then the youngster had to learn to shift for himself—wash and dress, turn up at meal hours, turn in with the chickens, rise with the crows.

It was a little different, however, with Eris, whom Mazie

had inherited. Eris, of course, was bottle-fed. White-water Queen's heifer-calf, White Princess, had no better care. Whatever was advisable was completely and thoroughly done in both cases.

White Princess grew to beautiful Guernsey symmetry, with every promise of conformation to classic type; and was duly registered. Little Eris, small boned, with delicately fashioned limbs, looked out on the world from a pair of crystal-blue, baby eyes, which ultimately became a deep, limpid grey.

Unlike White Princess, Eris did not promise to conform to the Odell type. There seemed to be little of that breed about her. Fanny had been bony and shiny-skinned, with a high-bridged, pinkish nose, watery eyes—a wisp of a woman with a rodent's teeth and every articulation apparent as a ridge under a dry, tightly stretched epidermis.

Odell, with his even, white teeth, coarse, highly-coloured skin and brown eyes, was a compact, stocky, heavy-handed, broad-footed product of Scotch-Irish pioneer stock. But Fanny's grandmother, a Louisiana Creole, had run away from school to go on the stage, and had married a handsome but dissolute Southern planter who died of drink.

Sundays Fanny used to wear her grandmother's portrait painted in miniature on ivory, as a breast-pin.

"Hand painted," she used to explain. And always added: "Creoles are all white." Which was true. But, when quarrelling with his wife, Odell pretended to believe otherwise.

Rummaging through Fanny's effects a day or two after her marriage, Mazie discovered a painted fan, a mother-of-pearl card-case, and this breast-pin. She carried the miniature to Odell.

"Looks like baby," she explained, with her care-free laugh.

"She'll be lucky if she favours that pitcher," said Odell.

"But like as not she'll take after Fanny." He was wrong in his guess.

When Eris was five her resemblance to the miniature had become marked. And Mazie's boys looked like their mother and father.

On Saturday nights, after immersing her own unwilling brunette brats in the weekly bath, Mazie found the slim white body of little Eris an ever-increasing amusement and a pique to her curiosity. The child's frail yet healthy symmetry, the fine skin, delicate, perfect limbs, lovely little hands and feet, remained perennial sources of mirth and surprise to this robust young woman who was equally healthy, but built on a big, colourful, vigorous plan.

Solid and large of limb and haunch, deep-bosomed, ruddy-skinned, the young stepmother always bred true to type. Her sons were sons of the soil from birth. There could be no doubt about her offspring. What wasn't Lister was Odell. They belonged to the land.

But when Mazie looked at her husband and looked at the child, Eris—and when she remembered Fanny—then she wondered and was inclined to smile. And she was content that her sons' thick, sturdy bodies and slanting, black eyes so plainly advertised the stock they came from. Utility. Health. Strength.

Fanny had had a pink nose. Even a Guernsey ought to have one. But the nose of Eris was snow white. To what stock did this child throw back?

When Eris was seven she was sent to the village school, leading her eldest stepbrother thither by the hand. Both were scared and tearful. Nobody went with little Eris to mitigate the ordeal; and she was a most sensitive child.

Hers had been a deathless curiosity since she was old enough to ask her first question. An unquenchable desire for information seemed to possess her. Her eternal, "Will you tell me why?" became a nuisance.

"Dang it, send her to school!" shouted Odell at last. And that was how.

At her small desk, rigid, bewildered, terribly intent on the first teacher in human form she had ever gazed upon, she found herself on the verge of tears. But, before she could dissolve, her brother forestalled her, bursting into vigorous yells, bawling like a calf; and would not be comforted. Which allowed Eris no time for private grief while wiping his eyes with her pinafore.

Noonday recess and lunch baskets and the wildly gyrating horde of children let loose on a sandy playground ended the first encounter between Eris Odell and the great god Education in His Local Temple at White Hills Village.

Eris learned little in school. There is little to learn in American schools. No nation is more illiterate. And in the sort of school she went to the ignorant are taught by the half educated.

None of her teachers could speak English as it should be spoken. In their limited vocabulary there was no room for choice of words. Perhaps that was why negatives were doubled now and then.

As for the rest, she was stuffed with falsified history and unessential geographical items; she was taught to read after a fashion, and to spell, and to juggle figures. There was a nature class, too, full of misinformation. And once an owlish, elderly man lectured on physiology; and told them in a low and solemn voice that "there is two sects in the phenonemy of natur, and little boys are made diffrent to little girls."

That ended the lecture, leaving every little boy and little girl mad with unsatisfied curiosity, and some of the older children slightly uncomfortable.

But The Great American Ass dominates this splendid land of ours. He *knows*. He'll tell the world. And that's that—as Odell was accustomed to say. And early in

her career little Eris caught the cant phrase of finality from her father, and incorporated it with her increasing lingual equipment.

When one of the boys tried to kiss her, she kicked his shins. "And that's *that!*" she added breathlessly, smoothing out her rumpled pinafore.

In Mazie she had a stepmother who made no difference between Eris and her own progeny. She kissed them all alike at bedtime; dosed them when necessary, comforted their sorrows with stock reassurances from a limited vocabulary, darned, sewed, mended, washed for all alike.

Mazie gave her children and her husband all she had time to give—all she had the capacity to give—the kindly, cheerful offices and understanding of a healthy female.

Whitewater Queen was as good a mother. Both lacked imagination. But Whitewater Queen didn't need any.

For a time, however, the knowledge imbibed at school nourished Eris, although there were few vitamines in the feed.

When she was thirteen her brothers—twelve, eleven, ten and nine—alternately bullied her, deferred to her, or ran bawling to her with their troubles.

When she was fourteen the world met its own weird at Armageddon. The old order of things began to change. A new earth and a newly interpreted Heaven replaced the "former things" which had "passed away."

At eighteen Eris looked out over the smoking débris of "former things"—gazed out of limpid grey eyes upon "a new Heaven and a new Earth"; and saw the cloudy, gigantic spectre of all-that-had-once-been receding, dissolving, vanishing from the world where it had reigned so tyrannically and so long.

About that time she dreamed, for the first time, that dream which so often re-occurred in after years—that she

stood at her open window, naked, winged, restless for flight to some tremendous height where dwelt the aged god of Wisdom all alone, cutting open a human heart that was still faintly pulsating.

At eighteen—the year the world war was ended—Eris “graduated.”

She wrote a little act for herself, designed her own costume, made it, acted, sang, and danced the part. It was the story of a poor girl who prays for two things—a pair of wings so that she may fly to the moon, and a new hat for the journey. Suddenly she discovers a new hat in her hands. The next instant two beautiful little wings sprout on her shoulders. Instantly she takes scissors and snips off the wings and trims her new hat with them. Ready for her journey, suddenly she realises that now she cannot fly. She tears the wings from the hat. Too late. She can't fasten them to her shoulders again. They flutter to her feet. She falls on her knees in a passion of tears. The moon rises, grinning.

It was a vast success—this little act of Eris Odell—and while its subtler intent was quite lost on the honest folk of White Hills Village, the story itself was so obvious and Eris did it so prettily that even her father grunted approval.

That evening he promised her the next heifer-calf for her own. If it proved a good one the sale of it should provide a nice nest-egg for Eris when she married.

The next heifer-calf promised well. Eris named her White Iris and she was so registered.

In the yearling pure-breeds she was first at the County Fair. But Eris refused to sell. At the State Fair White Iris beat every Guernsey and every other heifer, pure-breed and grade.

Brookvale Manor offered her three thousand dollars. Odell made her take it, and put the money into the local bank. So, with tears blinding her grey eyes, Eris sold

White Iris out of the county. And would not be comforted even by the brand new cheque-book sent to her by the cashier of the White Hills Bank.

The account, however, was in her father's name.

Now, the horizon of Eris Odell had narrowed as her sphere of activity dwindled after graduation.

Whitewater Farms became her world. Within its confines lay her duties and diversions, both clearly defined.

They were her heritage. No loop-holes offered escape—excepting marriage. And that way out was merely the way in to another and similar prison the boundary of which was a barbed wire fence, and its mathematical centre a manure pit.

She continued to dream of wings. An immense, indefinable longing possessed her in waking hours. But she was only one of the youthful, excited millions, waking after æons to the first instincts that had ruled the human race.

It was the restlessness of the world's youth that stirred her—Modern Youth opening millions of clear young eyes to gaze upon the wonders of a new Heaven and a new earth, and mad to explore it all from zenith to depths—sky, sea, land, and the waters under the earth. Youth, suddenly crazed by an overwhelming desire for Truth, after æons and æons of lies.

Explore, venture, achieve, live—demand Truth, exact it, face it, and *know!*—the mighty, voiceless cry of the World's Youth—claiming freedom to seek, liberty to live, fearless, untrammelled, triumphant. A terrible indictment of Age, and of those age-governed æons which forever have passed away.

Already the older, duller generation caught the vast vibration of young hearts beating to arms, young voices swelling the tremulous, universal cry of insurgence, a clear, ceaseless,

sea-like sound of laughter proclaiming the death of Sham—ringing an endless, silvery requiem.

Odell shoved up his spectacles and lowered the newspaper to glance at Eris.

“What say?” he repeated fretfully.

“I’d like to study dancing.”

“Can’t you dance? You go to enough socials and showers ‘n’one thing ‘n’other.”

“I mean—stage dancing.”

“Stage!” he thundered. “Be you crazy?”

“Why, Eris, how you talk!” said her stepmother, too astounded to laugh.

“I could go to New York and work in a store by day; and take stage-dancing lessons evenings,” murmured the girl. “I want to be somebody.”

“You stay here and do your chores and try to act as if you ain’t a little loonatic!” shouted Odell. “I’m sicka hearing about the capers and kickups of young folks nowaday. Them gallivantins don’t go in my house. I’m sicka reading about ‘em, too. And that’s *that!*”

“After all,” said Eris, “why do I have to do what I don’t care to do?”

“Dang it,” retorted her father, “didn’t you never hear of dooty? What d’they teach you in school?”

“Nothing much,” she replied listlessly. “Did you always want to be a farmer, daddy?”

“Hey?”

“Are you a farmer because you wanted to be? Or did you want to be something else?”

“What dinged trash you talk,” he said, disgusted. “I didn’t wanna be a blacksmith or I’d a been one.”

“Why can’t *I* be what I’d like to be?” Will you tell me why?”

Odell, speechless, resumed his newspaper. It was nearly

nine o'clock and he hadn't read half the local news and none of the column devoted to the Grange.

Eris looked wistfully at him, loitering still in the doorway, slim, grey-eyed, undeveloped.

Her stepmother laughed at her: "Notions," she said. "Don't you know you'd go to rack and rooin that way? You go to bed, Eris. . . . There's fresh ginger snaps in the pantry."

CHAPTER III

UNTIL the Great War turned the world upside down, Whitewater Farms made money after Odell married Ed Lister's daughter.

Shortage of labour during the war cut into profits; taxes wiped them out; the ugly, Bolshevik attitude of labour after the war caused a deficit.

It was the sullen inertia of the mob, conscious of power. Men did not care whether they worked at all. If they chose to work, mills and factories would pay them enough in three days to permit them to remain idle the remainder of the week. No farmer could pay the swollen wages demanded for field labour, and survive financially.

Every village was full of idle louts who sneered at offered employment.

Fruit rotted in orchards, grain remained uncut, cattle stood neglected. The great American loafer leered at the situation. The very name of Labour stank. It stinks still. The Great American Ass has made the term a stench in the nostrils of civilisation.

The next year mills and factories began to lay off labour. Odell and Lister scraped together a few sulky field hands, mainly incompetents, men who had spent all their wages. Fields were sullenly tilled, crops gathered, cattle cared for.

Except for profiteers, reaction had set in. War profli-gacy, asinine finance, crushing taxes already were doing their work.

Rather than pay for feed, farmers sold their stock. The demand for pork started everybody hog-raising. Prices

fell; loss followed. Then stagnation. It was the bitter aftermath of war—the deluge. Dead water.

Only one star of hope glimmered over the waste,—the New Administration.

Spring was a month early that year. Odell, at sixty, unimpaired by pie and the great American frying pan, his gaitered legs planted sturdily in the new grass, looked out over his domain and chewed a clover stem.

"I ain't afraid," he said to Lister. "I'm going the hull hog. Every acre."

"Where's your help?" remonstrated Lister.

"I got 'em."

"Some on 'em is quitters. They'll lay down on yeh, Elmer."

Odell spat out the clover stem: "Every acre, Ed!" he repeated. "And six cows on test."

"We ain't got the help——"

"Six cows," growled Odell; "White Lady, Snow Queen, Silver Maid, Thistledown, Milkweed Lass, and Whitewater Lily. . . . I gotta make money. I'm aimin' to and I'm a-going to. I got four sons. And that's that!"

"Elmer——"

"Awright. I know all what you gonna say, Ed. But where does it get you to go around with a face a foot long? How's things to start unless somebody starts 'em? Awright, prices is bad. You can't sell a pure-breed caaf in this dinged country. There isn't no market for a fancy heifer. Everybody's breedin' Holsteins 'n'sloshin' around after grades. Awright; nobody wants Guernsey quality; everybody wants Holstein bulk 'n'watery milk 'n'everything. I know. And my answer is, *every acre*, Ed; and six cows on test; and higher prices on every danged caaf that's dropped.

"If I sell a heifer it's a favour to be paid for through the nose. And I feed every bull-caaf and no vealin' this year. Enough hogs to turn out till October; not another danged

snout! If the Bank don't see me through I'll blow it up. Now, g'wan and make your plans."

He went into the creamery where his wife stood beside the separator, watching a cat lap up some spilled cream.

"Your pa's timid, Mazie," he said. "I tell him I cal'late t'start under full steam. What do you say?"

She laughed: "Pa's got notions. He allus was a mite slow. I guess you know best, Elmer."

"We all gotta work," he said. "That means Eris, too."

"She allus helps me," remarked Mazie, simply.

"I dunno what she does," grunted Odell; "—sets a hen or two, fools around the incubators, digs up a spoonful of scratch-feed—what does she do, anyhow?"

"The child mends and irons—"

"When she ain't readin' or tendin' her flowers or moonin' 'round the woods 'n' fields," retorted Odell. "Eris reckons she's too fine a lady for farm folk, I guess. I want her to keep busy. And that's that."

"Somebody's got to tend the flowers," remonstrated Mazie. "You don't want we should have no posy bed, Elmer—like poor folks down to the Holler, do you?"

"I can git along 'n' eat dinner without posies. Why don't Erie read the *Grange Journal*? Oh, no; it's fancy novels and highfalutin' books she studies onto. And she's allus cuttin' out these here fashions into these here magazines with coloured pitchers outside. Did you ever see Eris studyin' into a cook-book? Or a seed catalogue? Or the *Guernsey Cattle Magazine*? Or the *Breeder's Guide*—"

"You let her be," said Mazie, good-naturedly. "The housework's done and that's all you need to know. She can cook and make a bed if she's a mind to."

"Mind," growled Odell, "—what's a girl want of a mind? All she uses it for is to plan how to play-act on the stage or gallivant into moving pitchers. All she thinks about is how to git to New York to hunt up some fancy job so she can paint her face and dance in bare legs—"

"Now, Elmer, Eris is too smart to act foolish; and she's educated real well. You liked to see her act in school, and you thought she danced nicely. She's only a child yet——"

"She's twenty!"

"She's no more'n sixteen in her way of thinking, Elmer. She's a good girl."

"I didn't say she's bad. But she's twenty, and she ought to be more help to us. And she ought to quit readin' and moonin' and dreamin' and lazin'——"

"You quit *your* lazin', too," laughed Mazie, setting a pan of cream in the ice chest. "Why don't you go down to the barn and ring that new herd bull? You can't get him into the paddock without a staff any more. And if you don't watch out Whitewater Chieftain will hurt somebody. . . . 'N'I'll be a widow."

As Odell went out the dairy door, preoccupied with the ticklish job before him, he met Eris with her arms full of new kittens."

"Mitzi's," she explained, "aren't they too cunning, daddy? I hope they're not to be drowned."

"I ain't runnin' a cat-farm," remarked Odell. "Did you mend my canvas jacket?"

"Yes; it's on your bed."

"Did you coop them broody hens? I bet you didn't."

"Yes. There are seventeen in three coops."

"Housework done?"

"Yes."

"Awright. Why don't you get the cook-book and set in the hammock a spell?"

The girl laughed: "Don't you like mother's cooking?"

"S'all right for *me*. But I don't cal'late your mother's going to cook for the fella you hitch up with."

Eris turned up her nose: "Don't worry. I shan't ever marry. Not any boy in *this* town, anyway. Probably I'll never marry. . . . I'll not have time," she added, half to herself.

Odell, who was going, stopped.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"An actress ought not to marry. She ought to give every moment to her art," explained the girl naïvely.

"Is—that—so? Well, you can chase that idea outa your head, my girl, because you ain't never going to be no actress. And that's that!"

"Some day," said Eris, with a flushed smile, "I shall follow my own judgment and give myself to art. . . . And that's *that!*"

As they stood there, father and daughter, confronting each other in the pale April sunshine, the great herd bull bellowed from the cattle-barn, shaking the still air with his thunderous reverberations. He was to be shot that evening.

Eris sighed: "He misses his companions," she said, "and he tells us so. . . . Poor White Lightning. . . . And I, also, miss the companionship of all I have never known. . . . Some day I shall tell you so. . . . I hope you'll understand."

"You talk like a piece in a magazine," said Odell; "you better quit reading them danged love stories and movin' pitcher magazines and study into the *Farm Journal*."

"You'd be very proud of me if I became a great actress," she said seriously.

"I'd be a danged sight prouder if you was a great cook," he grunted. And he went toward the cattle-barn, spinning the patent self-piercing nose ring on his horny forefinger.

Eris called after him: "Have you *got* to shoot Lightning?"

"Yes, I gotta beef him. He's no good any more."

So the great herd bull, like all "Former Things," was doomed to "pass away."

As the Dionysia became the Mithraic Rites, so was taurian glory doomed to pass. . . . A bullet where Aldebaran shows the way. The way of all bulls.

Neither Odell nor Eris had ever heard of Aldebaran. And the tombs of the Magi were no more tightly sealed than the mind of the father. But the child's mind hid a little lamp unlighted. A whisper might reveal to her Aldebaran shining in the midnight heavens. Or the Keys of Life and Death hanging on the Rosy Cross. . . .

The bull died at the appointed hour. Eris stood in her bedroom closing both ears with trembling palms.

She did not hear the shot. Mazie found her there; laughed at her good-naturedly.

Eris' lips formed the words: "Is he dead?"

"My dear, he's Polack beef by now."

Gloria tauri—gloria mundi. But whatever ends always begins again.

What was the Dionysia is now Rosicrucian. . . . and shall again be something else. . . . and always the same.

As for the Bull of Mithra—and Mithra, too—bull-calves are born every day. And there are a million million suns in the making.

It's only the Old Order that changes, not what orders it.

CHAPTER IV

BULLS die; men die; the old order dies,—slowly sometimes, sometimes in the twinkling of an eye.

The change came swiftly upon Eris; passed more swiftly still, leaving no outward trace visible. But when it had passed, the heart and mind of Eris were altered. All doubt, all hesitation fled. She understood that now the road to the stars was open, and that, one day, she would do what she had been born to do.

The World War was partly responsible for the affair. The dye situation in the United States resulted. In Whitewater Mills, both dyes and mordants remained unsatisfactory. The mill chemist could do nothing and they let him go.

Where cotton was used in shoddy combination with wool, permanency of colour scarcely mattered—the poor always getting the dirty end of everything in a nation that has always laughed at a swindle.

But before the war, Whitewater Mills had built a separate plant for fine hosiery, lisle and silk, and had specialised in mauves and blues—fast, unfading, beautiful colours, the secret of which remained in Germany.

Now, desiring to resume, and unable to import, the directors of the mill sent a delegation to New York to find out what could be done.

There the delegates discovered, dug out, and engaged a chemist named E. Stuart Graydon.

It appeared that the secrets of German dyes and mordants were known to Mr. Graydon. How they became known to

him he explained very frankly and eloquently. Candour, an engaging smile, pale smooth features full of pale bluish shadows,—these and a trim figure neatly clothed made up the ensemble of Mr. Graydon.

Permanent colour was his specialty. Anyway, his long, steady fingers were permanently stained with acid and nicotine. He was employed by a photographer when they discovered him. Or, to be accurate, *he* discovered *them* at their third-class hotel on Broadway. . . . And never left them until he had signed a contract.

It was after church that somebody introduced E. Stuart Graydon to Eris.

He walked home with the family; and his talent for general conversation earned him an invitation to remain to midday dinner.

Quiet, convincing eloquence was his asset. There appeared to be no subject with which he was not reasonably familiar. His, also, was that terrible gift for familiarity of every description; he became a friend overnight, a member of the family in a week. He was what Broadway calls "quick study," never risking "going stale" by "letter perfect" preparation for an opening.

He took a deep interest in Guernsey breeding. But Odell did the talking. That was how Graydon acquired a reputation for an astonishing versatility;—he started the subject and kept it kindled while others did the talking. And in ten minutes he was able to converse upon the theme with a skilful and convincing fluency entirely irresistible.

After dinner Mazie showed him Fanny's miniature on ivory.

He smilingly sketched for the family a brief history of miniature painting. It happened that he was minutely familiar with all methods and all branches of Art. Indeed,

that was how the entire affair started. And Art accounted for the acid stains, also.

To Eris, Art included the drama, and all that her ardent mind desired. It took Mr. Graydon about five minutes to discover this. And of course it transpired that he knew everything connected with the drama, spoken and silent.

The next evening he came to supper. He talked cattle, ensilage, rotation of crops, sub-soils, inoculation, fertilisers, with Odell until the hypnotised farmer was loth to let him go.

He talked to Mazie about household economy, labour-saving devices, sanitary disposal plants, water systems, bleaches—with which he was dreadfully familiar—furniture polish, incubators.

With the boys he discussed guns and ammunition, traps and trapping, commercial education, the relation of labour to capital, baseball in the State League, ready-made clothing, the respective merits of pointers, setters, bull terriers and Airedales.

Hypnotised yawns protested against the bed hour in the household of Odell. Nobody desired to retire. The spell held like a trap.

As for Eris, she decided to stay in the sitting room with Mr. Graydon when the family's yawns at last started them blinking bedward.

Odell, yawning frightfully, got into his night-shirt and then into bed; and lay opening and shutting his eyes like an owl on the pillow while Mazie, for the first time in months, did her hair in curl papers.

"A nice, polite, steady young man," she said, nodding at Odell's reflection in the looking glass. "My sakes alive, Elmer, what an education he's got!"

"Stew Graydon knows a thing or two, I guess," yawned Odell. "You gotta be mighty spry to get a hold onto that young fella."

"I've a notion they pay him a lot down to the mill," suggested Mazie.

"You can't expec' to hire a Noo York man like that fer nothin'," agreed Odell. "He's smart, he is. And there's allus a market fer real smartness. Like as not that young fella will find himself a rich man in ten years. I guesso."

A silence; Mazie busy with her lustrous hair,—the plump, rosy, vigorous incarnation of matronly health.

In the mirror she caught Elmer's sleepy eye and laughed, displaying her white teeth.

"You think he kinda favours Eris?" she asked.

"Hey?"

"I don't know why else he come to supper."

"He come to supper to talk farmin' with me," said Odell gruffly.

"Maybe. Only I guess not," laughed Mazie.

"Well, why did he come, then? He wanted I should show him the new separator and them samples of cork-brick. He's a chemist, ain't he? He's int-rested in cork-brick and separators 'n' all like that."

Mazie twisted a curl paper around a thick brown tress.

"When he talked about the theatre and acting," she remarked, "did you notice how Eris acted?"

"She gawked at him," grunted Odell. "She'd better get that pitcher idee outa her fool head,—lazin' around readin' them pitcher magazines 'n' novels, 'n' moonin all over the place instid of findin' chores to occupy her 'n' doin' them—"

"Oh, hush," interrupted Mazie; "you talk and take on awful foolish, Elmer. When Eris marries some bright, steady boy, all that trash in her head will go into the slop-pail."

Odell scowled:

"Well, why don't she marry, then? She ain't no help to you—"

"She *is*! Hush up your head. You'll miss her, too,

when she marries, and some strange man takes her away. I guess I know who aims to do it, too."

"Well, who aims to do it? Hey? She don't have nothin' to say to our Whitewater boys. She allus acts proud and highmighty and uppish. Dan Burns he come sparkin' her 'n' she stayed in her room and wouldn't even come down to supper. 'N' there was Clay Wallace, 'n' Buddy Morgan——"

"It looks like she's willing to be sparked to-night, don't it?" said Mazie, with an odd little laugh.

Elmer rose on one elbow: "Say, you don't think *he* wants our Eris, do yeh?"

"Why not? Isn't Eris good enough for any man?"

"Well, well, dang it all, Stew Graydon seems diff-runt. . . . He's too educated 'n' stylish for plain folks—'n' he's got a big position in the mill. He don't want our Eris——"

"Why *not*?" repeated Mazie.

Odell shook his frowsy head: "He'll want a rich girl. Eris hain't got only that heifer money. I can't give her more'n a mite——"

"That don't count with me, 'Elmer.'" She flushed, "—it didn't count with *you*."

"Well, you was worth consid'ble more'n cash," he grunted.

"So's any girl—if a boy likes her."

"You think a smart man like Stew Graydon——"

"How do I know?" drawled Mazie. "She's downstairs yet with him, ain't she? I never knew her to act that way before. Nor you, either."

She never had "acted that way before."

The drowning swimmer and his straw—Eris and the first man she ever had met who had been actually in touch with the mystery of the moving pictures—that was the situation.

For Graydon's personality she had only the virginal in-

terest which is reassured by a pleasant manner, a pleasing voice, and the trim, neat inconspicuousness of face, figure, and apparel which invites neither criticism nor particular admiration,—nor alarm.

But for his education, his knowledge, his wisdom, his fluency,—above all for his evident sympathy and ability to understand her desire,—she had an excited and passionate need.

As he talked, he looked her over, carefully, cautiously—preoccupied with odd and curious ideas even while conversing about other things.

That evening, when taking leave, he pressed her slender fingers together, gently, not alarming her—scarcely even awaking self-consciousness. He was always the artist, first of all.

After a month, even Elmer understood that Graydon was “sparking” Eris.

And, from the time that Eris first was made to understand that fact she lived in a continuous, confused dream, through the unreality of which sometimes she was aware of her own heart beating with excitement.

He had said to her, one evening, after the family had gone to bed, that the stage was her vocation and that God himself must have ordained that she should, one day, triumph there.

She listened as in a blessed trance. All around her the night air grew heavy with the scent of honeysuckle. A moon was shining. The whippoorwill’s breathless cry came from the snake-fence hedge.

When he had had his mental will of her—excited her almost to blissful tears, soothed her, led her on, deftly, eloquently—he took her smooth hand of a child. All set for the last act, he drew the girl against his shoulder, taking plenty of time.

Her head was still swimming with his eloquence. Hope intoxicated her. His lips meant nothing on her cheek—but her mind was all a-quiver—and it was her mind alone that he had stimulated and excited to an ecstasy uncontrollable; and which now responded and acquiesced.

“And after we marry I am to study for the stage?” she repeated, tremulously, oblivious of his arm tightening around her body.

It transpired, gently and eloquently, that it was for this very reason he desired to marry her and give her what was nearest her girl’s heart—what her girl’s mind most ardently desired in all the world—her liberty to choose.

But he warned her to keep the secret from her family. Trembling, enchanted, almost frightened by the approaching splendour of consummation, she promised in tears.

Then the barrier burst under an overwhelming rush of gratitude. She was his. She would surrender, now, to this man who had suddenly appeared from nowhere;—an emissary of God sent to understand, sympathise, guide her to that destiny which, even he admitted, God had ordained as hers.

Eris was married to E. Stuart Graydon in her twentieth year at the parsonage of the Whitewater Church, at ten o’clock in the morning. All Whitewater attended and gorged. No rural precedent was neglected—neither jest nor rice nor old shoes,—everything happened, from the organ music and the unctuous patronage of “Rev. Styles,” to the thick aroma of the “bounteous repast” at Whitewater Farms, where neighbours came, stuffed themselves, and went away boisterously all that rainy afternoon.

Bride and groom were to depart on the six o’clock train for Niagara.

About five o’clock, the groom, chancing to glance out of the window, saw two men,—strangers in Whitewater but

perfectly well known to him,—walking up the path that led to the front door.

For a second he sat motionless; the next, he turned and looked into the grey eyes of his bride.

“Eris,” he said calmly, “if anybody asks for me say I’ve run down to the mill and I’ll be back in fifteen minutes.”

She smiled vaguely as he rose and went out the back way where the automobiles were parked.

A few minutes later Odell was called from the room by one of his sons:

“Say, pop, there’s a party out here inquiring for someone they call Eddie Graydon.”

Odell went out to the porch: “What name?” he demanded, eyeing the two strangers and their dripping umbrellas.”

“You Elmer Odell?” demanded the taller man.

“That’s what my ma christened me,” replied Odell, jocosely.

“Your daughter marrying a man who calls himself E. Stuart Graydon?”

“She ain’t marryin’ him. She’s done it.”

“Where is he?”

“He jest stepped out. Gone to the mill to fix up sunthin’ before leavin’.”

The taller man said to his companion: “Run down to the mill, will you?” And, as the other turned and walked rapidly away in the rain:

“I’ve got a warrant for Eddie Graydon when he comes back. That’s one of his names. Eddie Carter is the right one. Sorry for you, Mr. Odell; sorrier for your daughter.”

Odell stared at him, the purple veins beginning to swell on his temples.

“D-dang it!” he stammered,—“what’s all this dinged junk about? Who be you?”

And, when the tall, quiet man had terribly convinced him,

Odell staggered, slightly, and wiped the sweat from his temples.

"That lad has a record," said the detective, in his low, agreeable voice. "He's a fine artist and a crackerjack chemist. Maybe he don't know anything about the new tens and twenties. Maybe. Nor anything about the location of the plates. . . . My God, Mr. Odell, we've *got* to get those plates. Only Brockway could have equalled that engraving. Yes, sir—only the old man."

Odell scarcely heard him for the thunderous confusion in his brain.

He sat down, heavily, staring at space under knitted brows. Minute after minute passed. The distant laughter and clamour of guests came fitfully from the great kitchen beyond. It rained and rained on the veranda roof.

After a quarter of an hour the detective came in from the porch.

"You got a telephone, Mr. Odell?"

The farmer nodded.

"I want to call up my mate at the mill——" looking around the sitting room and finally locating the instrument. "What's the mill number?"

"Seven."

He gave the crank a turn; the metal bell jingled.

After a few moments he got his mate. He talked rapidly in a low, clear voice. Odell heard without listening or understanding. The detective hung up.

"Say," he said, "that fellow's gone. He won't come back here. He's gone!"

"What say?" mumbled Odell, wiping away the sweat.

"I'm telling you that Eddie Carter has beat us to it. He didn't go to the mill. He won't come back here. . . . Who's got a big yellow touring car—a Comet Six—in this town?"

Odell put his scarred hands to his forehead: "Doc Benson, I guess," he said vaguely.

"He here?"

"I guess he's in there eatin'."

"Well, tell him his car went out of town twenty minutes ago at sixty per," said the detective briskly. . . . "So long. I'm sorry. . . . Is there a garage in the village where they have cars for hire?"

"At the hotel," said the farmer. . . . "By God! . . ." He got up as though dazed.

"Mazie," he called hoarsely. Nobody heard him in the gay tumult. He stared after the detective, who was walking swiftly down the path in the rain.

"Jesus," he whispered. . . . "He done us all. . . . 'N' that's that! Oh, God!—'n' that's *that*!"

A nine days' scandal in the village—a year's food for gossip—and that was that, also.

Neither blame nor disgrace attached to anybody. Nobody thought less of the Odells, nor did they of themselves.

The crash of her dream-house stunned Eris. She took it very silently, with no outward emotion.

After a month the whole thing seemed, in fact, a dream—too unreal to believe or to grieve over.

After three months Odell talked vaguely of getting a di-vorce, "so's she kin hook up to somebody respectable when she's a mind to."

Then Eris flashed fire for the first time:

"I'll never marry again! Never! I never wanted to anyway. This is enough! I'll live and die as I am. And there'll be no more men in my life and no bother about divorce, either. He'll never come back. What do I care whether I'm married or not! It doesn't mean anything and it never will. I'm through with marriage and with marrying men! And that's *that*!"

CHAPTER V

IT was Sunday; and it was in May. To Whitewater Farms floated the sound of bells from three village churches, pealing alternately. With a final three strokes from each bell, Odell and Lister drove out of the horse-barn in the family carry-all. In God's honour, Odell wore a celluloid collar. Lister's reverence was expressed in a new scarlet bandanna.

Mazie, big, symmetrical, handsome in her trim summer clothes, appeared from the house, herding her loitering, loutish offspring—Gene, 18; Si, 17; Willis, 16; Buddy, 15; all habited in the dark, ready-made clothing and dark felt hats of rural ceremony, the gloomy similarity relieved only by ready-made satin neck-scarfs of different but primitive hues.

“Where's Eris?” inquired Odell.

Mazie laughed: “She ain't ready, what with her curling and her manicure set—busy 's'a bee from fingers to toes—”

“Eris!” shouted her father, looking up at the open window, where dotted muslin curtains were blowing.

Eris peeped out, her chestnut hair dishevelled.

“Don't wait,” she said. “I'll walk.”

Odell gathered the reins: “G'lang!” he grunted.

For twenty minutes or more there was no sound in the House of Odell except the flutter of muslin curtains.

Under the window a lilac bush was vibrant with bumble-bees; robins ran through the grass; blue-birds drifted along the fence from post to post in soft, moth-like flight.

It was quite a while after the kitchen clock struck that light, hurried steps sounded on the stairs.

Eris stepped out on the porch, radiant and in her best.

At twenty she had the slender immaturity of a girl of sixteen. Her slim figure made her seem taller than she was.

Her hat was one of those sagging straw affairs. It tied under the chin with lilac ribbon. Her thin white gown had lilac ribbons on it, too. So did her sun-shade.

She was very late. She walked to the gate, keeping to the brick path on account of her white shoes and stockings.

Here she consulted her wrist-watch. There was no use hurrying now. She glanced up and down the road—possibility of a belated neighbour giving her a lift to the village.

No, it was too late to hurry. Almost too late to go at all.

She looked up at the gate lilacs, broke off a heavy, mauve cluster, inhaled the fragrance.

For a little while, still, she lingered on the chance of a passing vehicle. Finally she returned to her room, took a book from her pillow, took "the key to the fields," and sauntered off through the hillside orchard, now a wilderness of pink and white bloom.

Everywhere the azure wings of blue-birds; the peach-red of a robin's breast; the broad golden glint of a flicker flashing through high white bloom.

The breeze which had fluttered her muslin curtains was busy up here, too, blowing white butterflies out of their courses and spreading silvery streaks across tall grasses.

On the hill-top she paused, looking out over the world of May.

Below her lay Whitewater Farms, neat as a group of newly-painted toys, house, barns with their hip-gables, silos, poultry-runs, sheds, out-buildings, whitewashed fences.

A mile south, buried among elms and maples, lay White Hills Village, the spires of its three churches piercing the foliage.

All around, east, west, south, rose low hills, patched with

woods, a barn or two in silhouette on some grassy ridge. Ploughed fields, pastures, squares of vivid winter wheat checkered the panorama, the tender green of hard-wood groves alternating with the dark beauty of hemlock and white pine.

Overhead a blue sky, quite cloudless; over all, May sunshine; the young world melodious with the songs of birds. And Eris, twenty, with the heart and experience of sixteen.

Sweet, thrilling came the meadow lark's calling from the crests of tall elms. It seemed to pierce her heart.

To the breezy stillness of the hill came faintly out of the valley the distant barking of a dog, a cock-crow, answered, answered again from some remoter farm.

Eris turned and looked into the north, where bluish hills spread away into the unknown.

Below her were the Home Woods, where Whitewater Brook ran over silver gravel, under mossy logs, pouring into deep, spreading pools, gliding swiftly amid a camouflage of ferns, gushing out over limestone beds to clatter and sparkle and fling rainbow spray across every sunny glade.

Eris looked down at the woods. To venture down there was not very good for her low-heeled, white sport shoes. . . . Of course she could clean them after noon dinner and they'd be dry in time for—anything. . . . But for *what?*

She paused at the wood's edge, her mind on her shoes.

"In time for what?" she repeated aloud.

She stood, abstracted, grey eyes brooding the question.

What was there to dress for—to clean her white shoes for? Evening service. A slow stroll with some neighbour's daughter along the village street. Gossip with other young people encountered in the lamp-lit dark. Banter with boys—passing the usual group clustered on fence or wall—jest born of rural wit, empty laughter, emptier retort—the slow stroll homeward. . . . This was what she

dressed for. . . . Or for a party . . . where the deadly familiarity of every face and voice had long since dulled her interest. . . . Where there was never any mental outlook; no aspiration, no stimulation—no response to her restless curiosity—where nobody could tell her “why.”

Standing there on the wood’s edge, she wondered why she was at pains to dress becomingly for the sake of such things as these.

She wondered why she cared for her person so scrupulously in a family where a bath a week was the rule—in a community where the drug-store carried neither orange-stick nor depilatory.

It is true, however, that with the advent of short skirts and prohibition it was now possible to purchase lip-stick and powder-puff in White Hills. And State Troopers had been there twice looking for hootch.

There was a rumour in local ecclesiastical circles that the youth of White Hills was headed hellward.

As yet the sweet-fern was only in tassel; Eris could pick her way, without danger to her stockings, through the strip of rough clearing. She entered the woods, pensively, amid the dappled shadows of new leaves.

Everywhere her eyes discovered young ferns and wild blossoms. Trillium and bunch-berry were still in bloom; viburnum, too; violets, blue, yellow and white; and a few pink moccasin flowers and late anemones.

Birds, too, sang everywhere; crows were noisy in the taller pines; glimpses of wood-thrush and Veery in moist thickets; clear little ecstasies of bird-song from high branches, the strident chirring of red squirrels, the mysterious, muffled drumming of a cock-grouse far in woodland depths.

Where a mossy limestone ledge hung low over White-water Brook, Eris spread her handkerchief and sat down on it carefully, laying her book beside her.

Here the stillness was melodious with golden harmonies from a little waterfall.

There were no black flies or midges yet,—no exasperating deer-flies either. Only gilded ephemera dancing over the water, where, at intervals, some burly trout broke with a splash.

Green-clouded swallow-tail butterflies in floppy, erratic flight, sped through sunny glades. Overhead sailed the great yellow swallow-tail,—in aerial battle, sometimes with the Beauty of Camberwell, the latter rather ragged and faded from last summer's gaiety, but with plenty of spirit left in her shabby wings.

Sun-spots glowed and waned; shadows flickered; water poured and glided between green banks, aglint with bubbles. The beauty of all things filled the young heart of Eris, reddened her lips, tormented her, almost hurt her with the desire for utterance.

If inexperience really has anything to express, it has no notion how to go about it.

Like vast, tinted, unreal clouds, her formless thoughts crowded her mind—guileless desire, innocent aspiration toward ineffable heights, ambition as chaste as immature.

And when in dreaming preoccupation the clouds took vague form, her unformed mind merely mirrored an unreal shape resembling herself—a magic dancing shape, ethereal, triumphant amid Olympian thunders of applause—a glittering shape, like hers, lovelier, facing the world from the jewelled splendour of the stage—a shadow-shape, gliding across the screen, worshipped in silence by a breathless multitude.

She opened her book. It was entitled: “How to Break into the Movies.” She read for a few moments, gave it up.

It was May in the world; and, in the heart of Eris, April. And a strange, ardent, restlessness in the heart of all youth

the whole world over—the renaissance, perhaps, of a primitive, lawless irresponsibility curbed into discipline æons ago. And, after ages, let loose again since the Twilight of the World fell over Armageddon.

Sooner or later she felt she must free mind, heart, body of whatever hampered, and go—go on about her business in life—whatever it might be—seek it throughout the world—ask the way—ask all things unknown to her—learn all things, understand, choose, achieve.

Twenty, in the April just ended! Her time was short. The time to be about her business in life was very near. . . . The time was here. . . . It was already here . . . if she only knew the way. . . . The way out. . . . The door that opened outward. . . .

Lifting her grey eyes she saw a man across the brook. He saw her at the same moment.

He was fat. He wore short rubber boots and no coat. Creel, bait-box, and fishing rod explained his presence on Whitewater. But as to his having any business there, he himself seemed in doubt.

“Hello, sister!” he said jauntily.

“Hello,” said Eris, politely.

“Is it all right for me to fish here?” he inquired. “I’m not trespassing, am I?”

“People fish through our woods,” replied Eris.

“Oh, are they *your* woods?” He looked around him at the trees as though to see what kind of sylvan property this girl possessed.

“A pretty spot,” he said with condescension, preparing to bait his hook. “I like pretty spots. It’s my business to hunt for them, too. Yes, and sometimes I hunt for dreary spots. Not that I like them, but it’s in my line——” He shoved a squirming worm onto the hook and wiped his hands on his trousers. “Yes, that’s my line—I’m in all kinds of

lines—even fish-lines——” He dropped his hook into the pool and stood intent, evidently indifferent to any potential applause as tribute to his wit.

He was sunburnt, fat, smooth-shaven. Thin hair partly covered his head in damp ringlets.

Presently he glanced across at Eris out of little bluish, puffy eyes which sagged at the corners. He winked at her, not offensively :

“Yes, that’s my best line, sister. . . . Spots! All kinds. Pretty, gloomy, lovely, dreary—oasis or desert, it doesn’t matter; I’m always in the market for spots.”

“Are you looking for a farm?” inquired Eris.

“Farm? Well, that’s in my line, too,—farms, mills, nice old stone bridges,—all that stuff is in my line,—in fact, everything is in my line,—and nothing *on* my line——” He lifted a dripping bait, lowered it again, winked at Eris.

“I suppose,” he said, “there isn’t a single thing in all the world that isn’t in my line. Why, even *you* are!” he added, laughing fatly. “What do you think of that, now?”

“What is your line?” she inquired, inclined to smile.

“Can’t you guess, girlie?”

“No, I can’t.”

“Well, I come out this way on location. The bunch is over at Summit. I’m just scouting out the lay over here. To-day’s Sunday, so I’m fishing. I can’t hunt spots every minute.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” said Eris.

“Why, we’re shooting the sanitarium over at Summit,” he explained, gently testing his line. As there was nothing on it he looked over at Eris.

“You don’t get me, sister,” he said. “It’s pictures. See?”

“Moving pictures?”

“Yeh, the Crystal Film outfit. We’re shooting the ‘Wild Girl.’ It’s all outside stuff now. We’re going to shoot ‘The Piker’ next. Nature stuff. That’s why.”

Once more he drew out and examined his bait. "Say," he demanded, "are there any fish in this stream?"

"Trout."

"Well, they seem to be darned scarce——"

"I want to ask you something," interrupted the girl, breathlessly.

"Shoot, sister."

"I want to know how people—how a girl——"

"Sure. I get you. I'm glad you asked me. They all ask that. You want to know how to get into pictures."

"Yes——"

"Of course. So does every living female in the United States. That's what sixty million women, young and old, want to know——"

He looked up, prepared to wink, but something in her flushed expression modified his jocose intention:

"Say, sister," he drawled, "*you* don't want to go into pictures."

"Yes, I do."

"What for?"

"Why are *you* in pictures?" she asked.

"God knows——"

"Will you please tell me why?"

"I like the job, I guess."

"So do I."

"Oh, very well," he said, laughing, "go to it, girlie."

"How?"

"Why, I can't tell you——"

"You *can*!"

He lifted his bait and flopped it into another place.

"Now, listen," he said, "some men would take notice of your pretty face and kid you along. That ain't me. If you break loose and go into pictures it's a one to a million shot you make carfare."

"I want to try."

"I can't give you a job, sister——"

"Would the Crystal Film management let me try?"

"Nobody would let you try unless they needed an extra."

"What is an extra?"

"A day's jobber. Maybe several days. Then it's hoofing it after the next job."

"Couldn't they let me try a small part?"

"We're cast. You got to begin as an extra, anyhow. There's nothing else to it, girlie——"

Something jerked his line; gingerly he lifted the rod, not "striking"; a plump trout fell from the hook into the water.

"Lost him, by jinx!" he exclaimed. "What the devil did I do that I hadn't oughto I dunno?"

"You should jerk when a trout bites. You just lifted him out. You can't hook a trout that way. . . . I hope you will be kind enough to give me your name and address, and help me to get into pictures."

For a while he stood silent, re-baiting his hook. When he was ready he cast the line into the water, laid the rod on the bank, drew out and lighted a large, pallid cigar.

"Of course," he remarked, "your parents are against your going into pictures."

"My mother is dead. My stepmother only laughs at me."

"How about papa?"

"He wouldn't like it."

"Same old scenario," he said. "And I'll give you the same old advice: if you got a good home, stay put. Have you?"

"Yes."

"But you don't want to stay put?"

"No."

"You want to run away and-be-a-great-actress?"

"I'm going to try."

"Try to do what?"

"Find out what I can do and do it!" she replied hotly, almost on the verge of tears.

He looked up at the delicate, flushed beauty of her face.

It wasn't a question of talent. Most women have the actress in them. With or lacking intelligence it can be developed enough for Broadway use.

"You young girls," he said, "expect to travel everywhere on your looks. And some of you do. And they last as long as their looks last. But men get nowhere without brains."

"I have brains," she retorted unsteadily.

"Let it go at that. But where's your experience?"

"How can I have it unless I—I try?"

"You think acting is your vocation, sister?"

"I intend to find out."

"You better listen to me and stick to a good home while the sticking's good!"

"I'm going into pictures," she said slowly. "And that's that!"

Wearying of bad luck the fat man started to move downstream toward another pool.

The girl rose straight up on her mossy rock, joining both hands in classic appeal, quite unconscious of her dramatic attitude.

"Please—*please* tell me who you are and where you live!" she beseeched him.

He was inclined to laugh; then her naïveté touched him.

"Well, sister," he said, "if you put it that way—my name is Quiss—Harry B. Quiss. I live in New York—Hotel Huron. You can find me there when I'm not on location or at the studio. . . . The Crystal Films Corporation. We're in the telephone book."

Mr. Quiss might have added that the Crystal Films Corporation was also on its beam-ends. But he couldn't quite do that. All he could say was: "Better stick to papa while the sticking's good, girlie. There's no money in pictures. They all bust sooner or later. Take it from one who's been blown sky-high more'n twice. And expects to go up more'n twice more."

He went slowly toward the pool below, gesticulating with his rod for emphasis:

"There's no money in pictures—not even for stars. I don't know where it all goes to. Don't ask me who gets it. I don't, anyway."

CHAPTER VI

ON Monday evening at five o'clock the Whitewater herd was ready for milking.

Odell, Ed Lister, and the foreman, Gene Lyford, scrubbed their hands and faces and put on clean white canvas clothes. Clyde Storm, helper, went along the lime-freshened concrete alleys, shaking out bran and tossing in clover hay. Everywhere in the steel stanchions beautiful Guernsey heads were turned to watch his progress. In the bull-pen the herd bull pried and butted at the bars. The barn vibrated with his contented lowing.

Calves in their pens came crowding to the bars like herded deer, or went bucketing about, excited to playful combat by the social gathering after an all-day separation.

In the stalls sleek flanks were being wiped down until they glistened like the coats of thoroughbred horses; udders were washed with tepid water; the whole place smelled fresh and clean as a hayfield.

No mechanical apparatus was employed at Whitewater Farms.

Odell, finished with the first cow, carried the foaming pail to the steelyards, weighed it, noted the result on the bulletin with a pencil that dangled there, and stepped aside to make room for Ed Lister, who came up with a brimming pail.

There was little conversation at milking hour, scarcely a word spoken except in admonition or reassurance to some restless cow—no sounds in the barn save the herd-bull's deep rumble of well-being, a gusty twitter of swallows from the eaves, the mellow noises of feeding cattle, clank and

creak of stanchion, gush and splash of water as some thirsty cow buried her pink nose in the patent fonts.

The still air grew fragrant with the scent of milk and clover-hay.

One or two grey cats came in, hopefully, and sat on the ladder-stairs, purring, observant, receptive.

The cows on test were in the western extension, all becoming a trifle restless now that their hour was again approaching. And presently two of Odell's sons, Si and Willis, came in, scrubbed and clothed in white, prepared to continue the exhaustive record already well initiated.

"Eris home yet?" asked Odell over his shoulder.

Si shook his head and picked up a pail.

"Well, where'n the dang-dinged town is she?" growled Odell. "If she's staying som'mers to supper, why can't she send word?"

Willis said: "Buddy went down street to look for her. Mommy sent him."

The boys passed on into the extension where the comely cattle on test stood impatient.

Odell remarked to Lister: "Ever since Eris drove over to Summit to see them pitcher people makin' movies she's acted sulky and contrary like. Now look at her stayin' away all day—'n' out to supper, too, som'mers."

"She acts like she's sot on sunthin'," suggested Lister, adjusting his milking stool and clasping the pail between his knees.

"She's sot on j'in ing some danged moving pitcher comp'ny," grunted Odell. "That's what's in her head all the time these days."

Lister's pail hummed with alternate streams of milk drumming on the tin. For a while he milked in silence save for a low-voiced remonstrance to the young and temperamental Guernsey whose near hind leg threatened trouble.

As he rose with the brimming pail he said: "I guess Eris

is a good girl. I guess she wouldn't go so far as to do nothin' rash, Elmer."

"I dunno. You couldn't never tell what Fanny had in her head. Fanny allus had her secret thoughts. I never knowed what she was figurin' out. Eris acts that way; she does what she's told but she thinks as she's a mind to. Too much brain ain't healthy for no woman."

Lister weighed his pail, scratched down the record opposite the cow's name, turned and looked back at Odell.

"Women oughta think the way their men-folks tell 'em," he said. "That's my idee. But the way they vote and carry on these days is a-sp'ilin' on 'em, accordin' to my way of figurin'."

Odell said nothing. As he stood weighing his pail of milk, Buddy came into the barn, eating a stick of shop candy.

"Say, pa," he called out, "mommy wants you up to the house!"

"When? Now?" demanded his father in dull surprise.

"I guess so. She said you was to come right up."

Odell placed the empty milk pail on the floor: "Eris home yet?"

"I dunno. I guess not. Will you let me milk Snow-bird, pa?"

"No. Look at your hands! You go up and shake down some hay. . . . Where's your ma?"

"She's up in Eris' room. She says for you to come. Can't I wash my hands and——"

"No. G'wan up to the loft. And don't step on the pitchfork, neither."

He turned uncertainly toward Lister and found his father-in-law looking at him.

"Kinda queer," he muttered, "Mazie sending for me when she knows I'm milking. . . ."

Lister made no comment. Odell went out heavily, crossed

the farm yard in the pleasant sunset glow, walked on toward the house with lagging stride.

As he set foot on the porch he became conscious of his irritation, felt the heat of it in his cheeks—the same old familiar resentment which had smouldered through the dingy, discordant years of his first marriage.

Here it was again, creeping through him after all these placid years with Mazie—the same sullen apprehension, dull unease verging on anger, invading his peace of mind, stirred this time by Fanny's child—Eris, daughter of Discord.

"Dang Fanny's breed," he muttered, entering the house, "—we allus was enemies deep down, . . . deep down in the flesh. . . ."

All at once he understood his real mind. Eris had always been Fanny's child. Never his. He remembered what Fanny had said to him at the approach of death—how, in that last desperate moment the battered mask of years had slipped from her bony visage and he had gazed into the stark face of immemorial antipathy, . . . the measureless resentment of a sex.

Fanny was dead. May God find out what she wants and give it to her. But Fanny's race persisted. She lived again in Eris. He was face to face with it again. . . . After twenty years of peace! . . .

He went to the foot of the stairs and called to his wife. Her voice answered from the floor above. He plodded on upstairs.

Mazie was standing in Eris' room, a pile of clothing on the bed, a suit-case and a small, flat trunk open on the floor.

She turned to Odell, her handsome features flushed, and the sparkle of tears in her slanting, black eyes.

"What's the trouble now?" he demanded, already divining it.

"She's gone, Elmer. She called me up on the telephone from Albany to tell me. The Crystal Fillum Company

offers her a contract. She wants her clothes and her money."

A heavy colour surged through the man's face.

"That's the danged secret blood in her," he said. "I knowed it. There's allus sunthin' hatchin' deep down in women of her blood. . . . She's allus had it in her mind to quit us. . . . She never was one of us. . . . All right, let her go. I'm done with her."

Mazie began unsteadily: "So many children of—of our day seem to feel like our Eris—"

"Mine don't! My boys ain't got nothin' secret into them! They ain't crazy in the head 'n' they ain't full o' fool notions."

Mazie remained silent. Her sons were fuller of "notions" than their father knew. It had required all the magnetism of her affection and authority to keep them headed toward a future on Whitewater Farms. For the nearest town was already calling them; they sniffed the soft-coal smoke from afar and were restless for the iron dissonance and human bustle of paved and narrow ways.

Theirs was the gregarious excitement instinct in human animals. Beyond the dingy monochrome of life they caught a glimmer of distant brightness. The vague summons of unknown but suspected pleasures stirred them as they travelled the sodden furrow.

Youth's physical instinct is to gather at the water-hole of this vast veldt we call the world, and wallow in the inviting mire of a thousand hoofs, and feel and hear and see the perpetual milling of the human herds that gather there.

Only in quality did Eris differ from her brothers. It was her mind—and the untasted pleasures of the mind—that drove her to the common fount.

There is a picture by Fragonard called "The Fountain of Love." And, as eagerly as the blond and glowing girl speeds to the brimming basin where mischievous little

winged Loves pour out for her the magic waters, so impetuously had Eris sped toward the fount of knowledge, hot, parched with desire to set her lips to immortal springs.

Odell's heavy eyes, brooding anger, followed Mazie's movements as she smoothed out the clothing and laid each garment in the trunk.

"You don't have to do that," he growled. "Let her come and get 'em if she wants 'em."

"But she needs——"

"Dang it, let 'em lay. Like's not she'll sicken o' them pitcher people before the week's out. She'll get her belly full o' notions. Let her caper till she runs into barbed wire. That'll sting some sense into her hide."

"She only took her little leather bag, Elmer——"

"She'll sicken sooner. I ain't worryin' none. She ain't a loose girl; she's just a fool heifer that goes bucketin' over a snake fence where it's half down. Let her kick up and skylark. You bet she'll hear the farm bell when it comes supper time——"

He turned away exasperated, but Mazie took him by the sleeve of his milking jacket:

"She's got to have money, Elmer——"

"No, she hain't! She'll sicken the quicker——"

"Elmer, it's her money."

"'Tain't. It's mine."

"It's her heifer money——"

"She shan't have it! Not till she's twenty-one. And that's that!"

Mazie looked at her husband in a distressed way, her black eyes full of tears:

"Elmer, you can't use a girl like a boy. A girl's a tender thing. And I was afraid of this—something like this. . . . Because Eris is a mite different. She likes to read and study. She likes to figure out what she reads about. She likes music and statues and art-things like the hand-painted

pictures we saw in Utica. There's no harm in art, I guess. . . . And you know how she always did love to dress up for church plays—and how nicely she sang and danced and acted in school——”

“Dang it all!” shouted Odell, beating one tanned fist within the other palm, “let her come home and cut her capers! She can do them things when there's a entertainment down to the church, can't she?

“That's enough for any girl, ain't it? And she can go to Utica and look at them hand-painted pitchers in the store windows. And she can dance to socials and showers like sensible girls and she can sing her head off Sundays in church when she's a mind to!

“All she's gotta do is come home and git the best of everything. But as long as she acts crazy and stays away, I'm done with her. And that's that!”

CHAPTER VII

SPRING had begun more than a month early. The young year promised agricultural miracles. All omens were favourable. Ed Lister predicted it would be a "hog-killin'."

June's magic turned Whitewater to a paradise. Crystal mornings gradually warming until sundown; gentle showers at night to freshen herbage and start a million planted seeds; blossoms, bees, buds, blue skies—all exquisitely balanced designs in June's enchanted tapestry—and nothing so far to mar the fabric—no late and malignant frost, no early drouth, broken violently by thunderbolt and deluge; no hail; no heavy winds to dry and sear; nothing untoward in the herd,—no milk-fever, no abortion, no terrifying emergency at night.

The only things to irritate Odell were the letters from Eris. They aroused in him the dumb, familiar anger of Fanny's time.

But after the first week in July there were no longer any letters from Eris. The girl had written two or three times during June, striving to explain herself, to make him understand her need of doing as she was doing, the necessity that some of her own money be sent her.

Her last letter arrived about the beginning of that dreadful era of unprecedented heat and drouth which ushered in July and which caused that summer to be long remembered in the Old World as well as in the New.

Odell's refusal to send her a single penny, and his repeated

summons for her return had finally silenced Eris. No more letters came. Odell's attitude silenced Mazie, too, whose primitive sense of duty was to her man first of all.

Sometimes she ventured to hope that Eris might, somehow, be successful. Oftener a comforting belief reassured her that the girl would soon return to material comforts and female duties, which were all Mazie comprehended of earthly happiness.

Odell's refusal to send Eris her money and her clothes worried Mazie when she had time to think. But what could she do? Man ruled Mazie's universe. It was proper that he should. All her life she had had to submit to him,—she had to cook for him, wash, sew, mend, care for his habitation, bear his children, feed them, wean them, and, in the endless sequence again, cook, wash, iron, sew, mend for these men-children which she had borne her man. And it was proper. It was the way of the world. Of heaven, too, perhaps. God himself was masculine. . . . She sometimes wondered whether there really was any rest there for female angels. . . .

Of what other women desired and did,—of aspiration, spiritual and intellectual discontent, Mazie knew nothing. For her nothing desirable existed beyond the barbed wire. And yet, without at all understanding Eris, always she had felt an odd sympathy for the girl's irregularities—had recognized that Fanny's child was different from herself, from her offspring—from other women's children. But the underlying motive that had sent Eris forth was quite beyond Mazie's ken. The resurrection of her sex came too early for her who had not yet died.

The farm year had begun prosperously. Until July there had been no cloud on the horizon. In imagination Odell gazed across acres and acres of golden harvest; saw a beneficent and paternal Government coming to the relief of all farmers; saw every silo packed, every barn bursting; saw the steady increase of the herd balanced by profitable sales;

saw ribbons and prizes awaiting his exhibits at County and State Fairs.

Yet, very often after supper, when standing on the porch chewing his quid as stolidly as his cows chewed their cuds, he was aware of a vague unease—as in Fanny's day.

He could not comprehend the transmission of resentment from Fanny to Fanny's child. He could much less understand the inherited resentment of a sex, now for the first time since creation making its defiance subtly felt the whole world through. *Sub jugum ad astra!* And now the Yoke had fallen; stars blazed beyond. Restless-winged, a Sex stood poised for flight, turning deaf ears to earthbound voices calling them back to hoods and bells and jesses.

One stifling hot night in July, after two weeks' enervating drouth, Odell's impotent wrath burst from the depths of bitterness long pent:

"That ding-danged slut will shame us yet if she don't come back! I'm done with her if she ain't in her own bed by Monday night. You write and tell her, Mazie. Tell her I'm through. Tell her I say so. And that's that!"

The "ding-danged slut" at that moment lay asleep on the grass in a New York public park. And all around her, on the hot and trampled grass, lay half-naked, beastly, breathing human heaps—the heat-tortured hordes of the unwashed.

CHAPTER VIII

JULY began badly in New York. Ambulances became busy, hospitals overcrowded, seaside resorts thronged. Day after day a heavy atmosphere hung like a saturated and steaming blanket over the city. The daily papers recorded deaths from heat. Fountains were full of naked urchins unmolested by police. Firemen drenched the little children of the poor with heavy showers from hose and stand-pipe.

Toward midnight, on the tenth day of the heat, a slight freshness tempered the infernal atmosphere of the streets. It was almost a breeze. In the Park dry leaves rustled slightly. Sleepers on bench and withered sward stirred, sighed, relaxed again into semi-stupor.

Two men in light clothes and straw hats, crossing the Park from West to East, paused on the asphalt path to gaze upon the thousands of prostrate figures.

"Yonder's a sob-stuff story for you, Barry," remarked the shorter man.

"There's more than one story there," said the other.

"No, only one. I'll tell you that story: these people had rather work and die in their putrid tenements than work and live in the wholesome countryside. You can't kick these town rats out of their rat-ridden city. They like to fester and swarm. And when any species swarms, Barry, Nature presently decimates it."

They moved along slowly, looking out over the dim meadows heaped with unstirring forms.

"Perhaps," admitted Annan, who had been addressed as Barry, "the mass story is about what you outlined, Mike; but there are other stories there——" He made a slight

gesture toward the meadow, "The whole gamut from farce to tragedy. . . ."

"The only drama in that mess is rooted in stupidity."

"That's where all tragedy is rooted. . . . I could step in among those people and in ten minutes I could bring back material for a Hugo, a Balzac, a Maupassant, a Dumas——"

"Why don't you? It's your job to look for literary loot in human scrap heaps. Here's life's dumping ground. You're the chiffonier. Why not start business?"

"I'm considering it."

"Go to it," laughed the other, lighting a cigarette and leaning gracefully on his walking stick. "Yonder's the sewer; dig out your diamond. Uproot your lily!"

Annan said: "Do you want to bet I can't go in there, wake up one of those unwashed, and, in ten minutes, get the roots of a story as good as any ever written?"

"If you weren't in a class by yourself," said the other, "I'd bet with you. Any ordinary newspaper man could go in there and dig up a dozen obvious news items. But you'll dig up a commonplace item and turn it into an epic. Or you'll dig up none at all, and come back with a corker——"

"I'll play square——"

"I know *you*! The biggest story in the world, Barry, was born a punk little news item; and it would have died an item except for the genius who covered it. You're one of those damned geniuses——"

"Don't try to hedge!——"

"Don't tell *me*! Nothing ever really happens except in clever brains. I can condense Hamlet's story into a paragraph. But I'm glad Shakespeare didn't. I'm glad the Apostles were——"

"You're a crazy Irishman, Coltfoot," remarked Annan, looking about him at the thousands of spectral sleepers. "Shut up. I need a story and I'm going to get one. . . . You don't want to take my bet, do you?"

'All right. Ten dollars that you don't get the honest

makings of a real story in ten minutes. No faking! No creative genius stuff. Just bald facts." He looked at his wrist watch, then at his companion. "Ready?"

Annan nodded, glanced out over the waste of withered grass. As he stepped from the asphalt to the meadow a tepid breeze began to blow, cooling his perspiring cheeks.

A few sleepers stirred feverishly. Under a wilted shrub a girl lifted her heavy head from the satchel that had pillowéd it. Then, slowly, she sat upright to face the faint stir of air.

Her hat fell off. She passed slim fingers through her bobbed hair, ruffling it to the cool wind blowing.

Annan walked directly toward her, picking his way across the grass among the sleeping heaps of people.

As he stopped beside her, Eris looked up at him out of tired eyes which seemed like wells of shadow, giving her pinched face an appearance almost skull-like.

Annan mistook her age, as did everybody; and he calmly squatted down on his haunches as though condescending to a child.

"Don't be afraid to talk to me," he said in his easy, persuasive way. "I write stories for newspapers. I'm looking for a story now. If you'll tell me your story I'll give you ten dollars."

Eris stared at him without comprehension. The increasing breeze blew her mop of chestnut curls upward from a brow as white as milk.

"Come," he said in his pleasant voice, "there are ten perfectly good dollars in it for you. All I want of you is your story—not your real name, of course,—just a few plain facts explaining how you happen to be sleeping here in Central Park with your little satchel for your pillow and the sky for your bed-clothes."

Eris remained motionless, one slender hand buried in the grass, the other resting against her temples. The blessed breeze began to winnow her hair again.

"Won't you talk to me?" urged Annan. "You're not afraid, are you?"

"I don't know what to say to you?"

"Just tell me how you happen to be sleeping here in the Park to-night."

"I have to save my money—" She yawned and concealed her lips with one hand.

"Please excuse me," she murmured, "I haven't slept very well."

"Then you have *some* money?" he inquired.

"I have twenty dollars. . . . Money doesn't last long in New York."

"No, it doesn't," agreed Annan gravely. "Did you work in a shop?"

"In pictures."

"Moving pictures?"

"Yes. I have a contract with the Crystal Films."

"Oh, yes. I heard about that outfit. It blew up. Did they ever pay you any salary?"

"No."

"How did you happen to hook up with that bunch of crooks?" he asked.

"I don't think they are crooks. Mr. Quiss isn't."

"Who's he?"

"Well—I think he looks up places to photograph—and he supplies extras—"

"A scout. Where did you run into him?"

"Near my home."

"Did your parents permit you to join that flossy outfit?"

"No."

"I see. You ran away."

"I—went away."

"Could you go home now if you wished to?"

"I don't wish to."

"Then you must believe that you really possess dramatic talent."

Eris passed her fingers wearily through her hair: "I am trying to learn something," she said, as though to herself. "I think I have talents."

"What is it you most desire to be?"

"I like to act . . . and dance. . . . I'd like to write a play . . . or a book . . . or something. . . ."

"Like other people, you're after fame and fortune. I'm chasing them, too. Everybody is. But the world's goal remains the same, no matter what you are hunting. That goal is Happiness."

She looked at him, heavy-eyed, silent. She yawned slightly, murmured an excuse, rubbed her eyes with her forefinger.

"Which is your principal object in life, fame or fortune?" he inquired, smiling.

"Are those the principal objects in life?" she asked, so naïvely that he suspected her.

"Some believe that love is more important," he said. "Do you?"

She rested her pale cheek on her hand: "No," she said.

"Then what *is* your principal object in life?" he asked, watching her intently.

"I think, more than anything, I desire education."

His surprise was followed by further suspicion. Her reply sounded too naïve, too moral. He became wary of the latent actress in her."

She sat there huddled up, brooding, gazing into the darkness out of haunted eyes.

"Do you think an education is really worth this sort of hardship?" he asked.

That seemed to interest her. She replied:

"I think so. . . . I don't know."

"What are you trying to learn?"

"The truth . . . about things."

"Why don't you go to school?"

"I've been through high-school."

"Didn't you learn the truth about things in high-school?"
"I don't think so."

"Where are you going to learn it then?"

She was plainly interested now:

"I think the only way is to find out for myself. . . . I don't know anybody who can tell me reasons. I like to be told *why*. If I don't know the facts about life how can I write plays and act them? I *must* find out. I'm twenty, and I know scarcely anything worth knowing. It is awful. It frightens me. I'm crazy to be somebody. I can't be unless I learn the truth about things."

"There is nobody at home to tell me. . . . I couldn't stand it any longer. . . . I *had* to find out for myself. Books don't help. They excite." She looked at him feverishly: "It is a terrible thing to want only facts," she said. "Because nothing else satisfies."

He thought, incredulously, "Where did she get that line?" He said: "A taste for Truth spoils one's appetite for anything else. . . . So that's what you're after, is it? You're after the truth about things."

She did not reply.

He said, always watching her: "When you know the truth what are you going to do with it?"

"Act it. Write it."

"Live it, too?" he inquired gravely.

She turned to look at him, not comprehending.

"Where are you going to get the money to do all this?" he asked lightly.

"It is going to be difficult—without money," she admitted.

Something in the situation stirred a perverse sort of humour in him. He didn't quite believe in her, as she revealed her complexities and her simplicities out of her own mouth.

"The love of money is the root of all good," he remarked.

After a silence: "I wonder," she said thoughtfully. "One needs it to do good . . . perhaps to *be* good. . . . Nobody can tell, I suppose, what starvation might do to them. . . . Money *is* good."

"All things are difficult without money," he said, pursuing his perverse thesis. "The love of it is not the root of all evil. Money is often salvation. Lack of it fetters effort. Want of it retards fulfilment. Without it ambition is crippled. Aspiration remains a dream. Lacking a penny-worth of bread, Hamlet had never been written. . . . I think I'll say as much in my next story."

His was an easy and humorous tongue, facile and creative, too—it being his business to juggle nimbly with ideas and amuse an audience at so much a column.

Eris listened, unaware that he was poking fun at himself. Her shadowy eyes were intent on his in the starlight. The white, sharp contours of her face interested him. He was alert for any word or tone or gesture done for dramatic effect.

"So that's your story, then," he said in his gay, agreeable voice. "You are a little pilgrim of Minerva in quest of Wisdom, travelling afoot through the world with an empty wallet and no staff to comfort you."

"I understand what you mean," she said. "Minerva was goddess of Wisdom. We had mythology in high-school."

He thought: "She's a clever comedienne or an utter baby." He said: "Is that really all there is to your story?"

"I have no story."

"No ill-treatment at home to warrant your running away?"

"Oh, no."

"Not even an unhappy love affair?"

She shook her head slightly as though embarrassed.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty in April."

Annan was silent. He had not supposed her to be over

seventeen. She had seemed little more than a child in the starlight when she sat up ruffling her bobbed hair in the first tepid breeze.

She said seriously: "I am growing old. And if I have talent I have no time to waste. That is why I went away at the first opportunity."

"What are your talents?"

"I dance. I have acted in school plays. Once I wrote a one-act piece for myself. They liked it."

"Go ahead and tell me about it."

She told him how she had written the act and how she had sung and danced. Stimulated by the memory of her little success, she ventured to speak of her connection with the Crystal Films. Then, suddenly, the long pent flood of trouble poured out of her lonely heart.

"I drove over to Summit," she said, "where they had been shooting an exterior. Mr. Quiss introduced me to Mr. Donnell, the director. Mr. Donnell said that they were just leaving for Albany on location, and he couldn't give me a test. So I went to Albany the next morning—I just packed my night-clothes and walked all the way to Gayfield to catch the six o'clock morning train. It was my first chance. I seemed to realise that. I took fifty dollars I had saved. I have spent thirty of it already.

"At Albany Mr. Donnell had a test made of me. It turned out well. He offered me a contract. I telephoned to my stepmother and told her what I had done. I explained that I needed money. . . . I have some money of my own. But my father wouldn't let me have it. I wrote several times, but they only told me to come home. They wouldn't let me have any money.

"Then, when the company arrived at the New York studio, Mr. Donnell seemed to be in trouble. We were not paid. I heard Mr. Quiss say that the principals had received no salary for a month. He said that Mr. Donnell had not been paid, either. The carpenters who were building sets refused

to go on until they had their wages. Somebody cut off the electric current. Our dynamo stopped. We stood around all day. Somebody said that the bankers who owned the Crystal Films were in financial difficulties.

"Then, the next morning, when we reported for work at the studio, we found it locked. I was sorry for our company. Even the principals seemed to be in need of money. Mr. Quiss was very kind to me. He offered to pay my fare back home. But I wouldn't go. Mr. Donnell offered to lend me ten dollars, but I told him I had twenty. He gave me a nice letter to the Elite Agency. Mr. Quiss promised to keep me in mind. But the agencies tell me that all the film companies are letting their people go this summer. I can't seem to find any work. They tell me there won't be any work until October. . . . I'm saving my twenty dollars. And I'm wondering what I shall find to do to keep busy until October. . . . Even if I could afford a room, I don't need it. It is too hot in New York to sleep indoors. . . . I can wash my face and hands in the ladies' room of any hotel. I give the maid five cents. . . . But I don't know what to do for a bath. I must do something. . . . I shall hire a room for a day and wash myself and my clothes. . . . You see, twenty dollars doesn't go very far in New York. . . . I wonder how far I can go on it. . . . Do you know what would be the very cheapest way to live on twenty dollars until October?"

After a silence Annan said: "I owe you ten for your story. That makes thirty dollars."

"Oh. But I can't take money from *you!*"

"Why?"

"I haven't earned it. I had no story to tell you. I've only talked to you."

Annan, sitting cross-legged on the grass, clasped his knees with both arms. He said, coolly:

"I offered you ten dollars for your story. That was too little to offer for such a story. It's worth more."

"Why, it isn't worth anything," she retorted. "I hadn't any story to tell you. I shan't let you give me money just because I've talked to you."

"Can you guess how much I shall be paid by my newspaper for writing out this story you have told me?" he asked, smiling at her in the starlight.

She shook her head.

"Well, I won't bother you with details; but your commission in this transaction will be considerable. Your commission will amount to a hundred dollars."

She sat so rigid and unstirring that he leaned a little toward her to see her expression. It was flushed and hostile.

"Do you think I am joking?" he asked.

"I don't know what you are doing."

He said: "I'm not mean enough to make a joke of your predicament. I'm telling you very honestly that I can construct a first-rate short story out of the story you have just told me. I'm workman enough to do it. That's my job.

"Every week I write a short story for the Sunday edition of the New York *Planet*. My stories have become popular. My name is becoming rather well known. I am now paid so well for my stories that I can afford to pay well for the idea you have given me. Your story is full of ideas, and it's worth about a hundred dollars to me."

"It isn't worth a cent," she said. "I don't want you to offer me money. . . . Or anything . . ." She laid both hands against her forehead as though her head ached, and sat huddled up, elbows resting on her knees. Presently she yawned.

"Please excuse me," she murmured, "I seem to be tired."

There was a long silence. Annan turned his head to see if his friend Coltfoot still waited. Not discovering him, he inspected his watch. Surprised, he lit a match to make

certain of the time; and discovered that he had been talking with this girl for more than an hour and a half.

He said to her in his pleasant, persuasive voice: "You're not afraid of me, are you?"

She looked up, white and tired: "I'm not afraid of anybody."

"Well, you're not entirely right. However, if you're not afraid of me, suppose I help you find a room to-night. You can afford a room now."

She shook her head.

"You intend to stay here?"

"Yes, to-night."

"You'd better not stay here with a hundred and twenty dollars in your pocket."

"I shan't take money from you."

"Do you want me to lose five hundred dollars?"

"How?" she asked, bewildered by the sudden impatience in his voice.

"If I write the story I get six hundred. I won't write it unless you take your commission."

She said nothing.

"Come," he said, almost sharply. "I'm not going to leave you here. You need a bath, anyway. You can't get a good rest unless you have a bath."

He sprang up from the grass, took her hand before she could withdraw it, and drew her forcibly to her feet.

"Maybe you're twenty," he said, "but some cop is likely to take you to the Arsenal as a lost child."

She seemed so startled that he reassured her with a smile,—stooped to pick up her hat and satchel, still smiling.

"Come on, little pilgrim," he said, "it's two o'clock in the morning, and the Temple of Wisdom is closed. Bath and bed is your best bet."

She pinned on her hat mechanically, smoothed her wrinkled dress. Then she looked up at him in a dazed way.

"Ready?" he asked gently.

"Yes. What do you want me to do?"

"Let's go," he said lightly, and took her by the hand again.

Slowly through starry darkness he guided her between prone shapes on the grass, and so along the asphalt, east, until the silvery lamps of Fifth Avenue stretched away before them in endless, level constellations.

He was beginning to wonder where to take her at such an hour. But to the sort of mind that was Annan's, direct method and simple solution always appealed. He came to a swift conclusion,—came to it the more easily because it was an amusing one.

"You're not afraid of me, you say?" he repeated.

She shook her head. "You seem kind. . . . Should I be?"

"Well, not in my case," he said, laughing. . . . "We'll take that taxi—" He hailed it, gave directions, and seated himself beside her, now keenly amused.

"Little pilgrim," he said, "you're going to have a good scrub, a good sleep in a good bed, and a jolly good breakfast when you wake up. *What do you think of that!*"

"I don't know what to think. . . . I have found much kindness among strangers."

He laughed and lighted a cigarette. The avenue was nearly deserted. At Forty-second Street the taxi swung west to Seventh Avenue, south, passing Twenty-third Street, west again through a maze of crooked old-time streets. It stopped, finally, before a two-story and basement house of red brick—one of many similar houses that lined both sides of a dark and very silent block.

Annan got out, paid his fare, took the little satchel, and handed Eris out.

"Is it a boarding house?" she asked.

"One lodges well here," he replied carelessly.

They ascended the stoop; Annan used his latch key, let her in, switched on the light.

"Come up," he said briefly.

On the landing at the top of the stairs he switched on another light, opened a door, lighted a third bracket.

"Come in!"

Eris entered the bed-room. It was large. So was the bed, a four-poster. So was the furniture.

"Here's your bath-room," he remarked, opening a door into a white-tiled room. He stepped inside to be certain. There were plenty of towels, soap still in its wrapper, a row of bottles with flowers painted on them—evidently for masculine use—cologne, bay rum, witch hazel, hair-tonic.

"Now," he said, "your worries are over until to-morrow. There's your tub, there's your bed, there's a key in the door. Lock it when you turn in. And don't you stir until they bring your breakfast in the morning."

Eris nodded.

"All right. Good-night."

She turned toward him as though still a little bewildered.

"Are you going?" she asked timidly.

"Yes. Is there anything you need?"

"No. . . . I would like to thank you—if you are going. . . ."

"Little pilgrim," he said, "I want to thank *you* for an interesting evening."

He held out his hand; Eris laid hers in it.

"You needn't tell me your name," he said smilingly, "—unless you choose to."

"Eris Odell."

"Eris! Well, that's rather classic, isn't it? That's an—unusual—name. . . . Eris. Suggests Mount Ida and golden apples, doesn't it?—Or is it your stage name?"

Puzzled, smiling, he stood looking at her, still retaining her hand.

"No, it's my name."

"Well, then, my name is Barry Annan. . . . And I think it's time we both got a little sleep. . . ."

He shook her slender hand formally, released it.

"Good night, Eris," he said. "Lock your door and go to sleep."

"Good night," she replied in a tired, unsteady voice.

Annan walked through the corridor into the front bedroom and turned on his light.

He seemed to be much amused with the situation,—a little worried, too.

"She'll get in Dutch if she doesn't look out," he thought as he went about his preparations for the night. . . . "A funny type. . . . Rather convincing. . . . Or a consummate actress. . . . But she's most amusing anyway. Let's see how she turns out. . . . She *looks* hungry. . . . What a little fool! . . . Now, you couldn't put this over on the stage or in a story. . . . Your public is too wise. They don't grow that kind of girl these days. . . . That's romantic stuff and it won't go with the wise guy. . . . You can't pull a character like this girl on any New York audience. And yet, there she is—in there, scrubbing herself, if I can judge by the sound of running water. . . . No, she doesn't exist. . . . And yet, there she is! . . . Only I'm too clever to believe in her. . . . There is no fool like a smart one. . . . That is why the Great American Ass is the greatest ass on earth. . . ."

CHAPTER IX

MRS. SNIFFEN, who had looked after Annan for thirty years, found him bathed, shaved, and dressed, and busy writing when she brought him his breakfast tray.

"The gentleman in the other room, Mr. Barry—when is he to 'ave 'is breakfast?"

"It's a lady, old dear."

Mrs. Sniffen's pointed nose went up with a jerk. He had been counting on that. He liked to see Mrs. Sniffen's nose jerk upward.

"A pretty lady," he added, "with bobbed hair. I met her accidentally about two o'clock this morning in Central Park."

When the effect upon Mrs. Sniffen had sufficiently diverted him, he told her very briefly the story of Eris.

"I'm writing it now," he added, grinning. "Sob-stuff, Xantippe. I'm going to make a little gem of it. It'll be a heart-yanking tragedy—predestined woe from the beginning. That's what they want to-day,—weeps. So I'm going to make 'em snivel. . . . Moral stuff, old dear. You'll like it. Now, be nice to that girl in there when she wakes up——"

He put his arm around Mrs. Sniffen's starched and angular shoulders as she indignantly placed his tray on the desk before him.

"Leave me be, Mr. Barry," she said sharply.

Some of the parties given by Annan had been attended by what Mrs. Sniffen considered "hussies." Annan gave various sorts of parties. Some were approved by Mrs. Sniffen, some she disapproved. Her sentiments made a chilling difference in her demeanour, not in her efficiency. She was a

trained servant first of all. She had been in Annan's family for forty years.

"Be kind to her," repeated Annan, giving Mrs. Sniffen a pat and a hug. "She's a good little girl. . . . Too good, perhaps, to survive long. She's the sort of girl you read about in romance forty years ago. She's a Drury Lane victim. They were all fools, you know. I couldn't leave the suffering heroine of a Victorian novel out in the Park all night, could I, old dear?"

"It's your 'ouse, Mr. Barry," said Mrs. Sniffen grimly. "Don't be trying to get around me with your imperent, easy ways—"

"I'm not trying to. When you see her and talk to her you'll agree with me that she is as virtuous as she is beautiful. Of course," he added, "virtue without beauty is unknown in polite fiction, and is to be severely discouraged."

"You're the master," snapped Mrs. Sniffen. "I know my place. I 'ope others will know theirs—particularly minxes—"

"Now, Xantippe, don't freeze the child stiff. I'm very sure she isn't a minx—"

Mrs. Sniffen coldly laid down the law of suspects:

"I'll know what she is when I see her. . . . There's minxes and there's 'ussies; and there's sluts and scuts. And there's them that walk in silk and them that wear h'aprons. And there's them that would rather die where they lie than take bed and bread of a strange young gentleman who follows 'is fancy for a lark on a 'ot night in the Park. 'Ussies are 'ussies. And I'm not to be deceived at my time o' life."

Annan chipped an egg, undisturbed. "I know you, Xantippe," he remarked. "You may not like some of the people who come here, but you'll be nice to this girl. . . . Take her breakfast to her at ten-thirty; look her over; come in and report to me."

"Very well, sir."

Annan went on with his breakfast, leisurely. As he ate he read over his pencilled manuscript and corrected it between bites of muffin and bacon.

It was laid out on the lines of those modern short stories which had proven so popular and which had lifted Barry Annan out of the uniform ranks of the unidentified and given him an individual and approving audience for whatever he chose to offer them.

Already there had been lively competition among periodical publishers for the work of this new-comer.

His first volume of short stories was now in preparation. Repetition had stencilled his name and his photograph upon the public cerebrum. Success had not yet enraged the less successful in the literary puddle. The frogs chanted politely in praise of their own comrade.

The maiden, too, who sips the literary soup that seeps through the pages of periodical publications, was already requesting his autograph. Clipping agencies began to pursue him; film companies wasted his time with glittering offers that never materialised. Annan was on the way to premature fame and fortune. And to the aftermath that follows for all who win too easily and too soon.

There is a King Stork for all puddles. His law is the law of compensations. Dame Nature executes it—alike on species that swarm and on individuals that ripen too quickly.

Annan wrote very fast. There were about thirty-five hundred words in the story of Eris. He finished it by half-past ten.

Rereading it, he realised it had all the concentrated brilliancy of an epigram. Whether or not it would hold water did not bother him. The story of Eris was Barry Annan at his easiest and most persuasive. There was the characteristic and ungodly skill in it, the subtle partnership with a mindless public that seduces to mental speculation; the reassuring caress as reward for intellectual penetration; that inborn cleverness that makes the reader see, applaud, or

pity him or herself in the sympathetic rôle of a plaything of Chance and Fate.

And always Barry Annan left the victim of his tact and technique agreeably trapped, suffering gratefully, excited by self-approval to the verge of sentimental tears.

"That'll make 'em ruffle their plumage and gulp down a sob or two," he reflected, his tongue in his cheek, a little intoxicated, as usual, by his own infernal facility.

He lit a cigarette, shuffled his manuscript, numbered the pages, and stuffed them into his pocket. The damned thing was done.

Walking to the window he looked out into Governor's Place—one of those ancient and forgotten Greenwich streets, and now very still and deserted in the intense July sunshine.

Already the hazy morning threatened to be hotter than its humid predecessors. Nothing stirred in the street, not a cat, not an iceman, not even a sparrow.

Tall old trees, catalpa, maple, ailanthus,—remnants of those old-time double ranks that once lined both sidewalks,—spread solitary pools of shade over flagstone and asphalt. All else lay naked in the glare.

Mrs. Sniffen appeared, starched to the throat, crisp, unperspiring in her calico.

"She's 'ad her breakfast, sir."

"Oh! How is she feeling?"

"Could you lend her a bath-robe and slippers, sir?"

He smiled: "Has she concluded to stay here indefinitely?"

"Her clothes are in the tub, Mr. Barry."

"In the bath-tub?"

"In the laundry tub."

"Oh. So you're going to do her laundry for her!"

"It's no trouble, sir. I can 'ave them for her by early afternoon."

"You're a duck, Xantippe. You look after her. I'm going down-town to the office. Give her some lunch."

"Very good, sir."

He followed Mrs. Sniffen to the corridor, where his straw hat and malacca stick hung on a peg.

"Am I right, or is she a hussie?" he inquired, mischievously.

"She's an idjit," snapped Mrs. Sniffen. "Spanking is what she needs."

"You give her one," he suggested in guarded tones, glancing instinctively at the closed door beyond.

"Shall you be back to lunch, sir?"

He was descending the stairs, his story bulging in his coat pocket.

"No; but don't let her go till I come back. I'm going to try to persuade her to go home to the pigs and cows. . . . And, Xantippe, there'll be four to dinner. Eight o'clock will be all right. . . . I'd like a few flowers."

"Very well, sir."

Annan went out. The house had cooled during the night and the heat in the street struck him in the face.

"Hell," he muttered, "isn't there any end to this!"

There is no shabbier, dingier city in the world than New York in midsummer.

The metropolis seems to be inhabited by a race constitutionally untidy, indifferent to dirt, ignorant of beauty, of the elements of civic pride and duty.

For health and comfort alone, tree-shaded streets are a necessity; but in New York there is a strange hostility to trees. The few that survive mutilation by vandals,—animal and human,—are species that ought not to be planted in such a city.

A few miserable elms, distorted poplars, crippled maples, accentuate barren vistas. Lamp posts and fire boxes fill up the iron void, stark as the blasted woods of no-man's land.

Annan found Coltfoot, the Sunday editor, in his undershirt, drops of sweat spangling the copy he was pencilling.

"You didn't wait last night," began Annan.

"What do you think I am!" growled Coltfoot. "I need sleep if you don't." He picked up a cold cigar, relighted it.

"Do I get your ten or do you get mine?"

"There's her story," said Annan, tossing the manuscript onto the desk.

"Is it straight?"

"No, of course not. You yourself said that nothing really ever happens except in the human brain."

"Then you hand me ten?"

"I found a news item and made a story of it. As the girl is still alive, I had to end my story by deduction."

"What do you do, kill her off?"

"I do."

"You and your morgue," grunted Coltfoot. "—it's a wonder your public stands for all the stiffness you bring in. . . . But they do. . . . They want more, too. It's a murderous era. Fashion and taste have become necrological. But mortuary pleasures pass. Happy endings and bridal bells will come again. Then you tailors of Grubb Street will have to cut your shrouds according."

He glanced at the first pencilled page, skimmed it, read the next sheet more slowly, lingered over the third—suddenly slapped the manuscript with open palm:

"All right. All right! You get away with murder, as usual. . . . Your stuff is dope. Anybody is an ass to try it. It's habit-forming stuff. I don't know now whether I owe you ten. I guess I do, don't I?"

"We'll have to wait and see what happens to her. If her story works out like *my* version of her story, you'll owe me ten," said Annan, laughing.

"What really happened last night after I left?" demanded Coltfoot.

Annan told him, briefly.

"What," exclaimed the other, "is that tramp girl still in your house?"

"Yes, poor little devil. I'm going to ship her back to her native dairy this afternoon. . . . By the way, you're dining with me, you know."

Coltfoot nodded, pushed a button and dragged a bunch of copy toward him.

"Get out of here," he said.

Annan lunched at the Pewter Mug, a club for clever professionals, where there were neither officers nor elections to membership, nor initiation fees, nor vouchers to sign.

Nobody seemed to know how it originated, how it was run, how members became members.

One paid cash for luncheon or dinner. The dues were fifty dollars yearly, dumped into a locked box in cash.

Of course, some one man managed the Pewter Mug. Several were suspected. But nobody in the large membership was certain of his identity.

Thither strolled Barry Annan after a scorching trip uptown. Wilted members drifted in to dawdle over cold dishes,—clever youngsters who had made individual splashes in their several puddles; professionals all,—players, writers, painters, composers, architects, engineers, physicians, sailors, soldiers,—the roll call represented all the creative and interpretive professions that America is heir to.

Annan's left-hand neighbour at the long table was a boy officer whose aëroplane had landed successfully on Pike's Peak, to the glory of the service and the star-spangled banner.

On his right a young man named Bruce ate cold lobster languidly. He was going to Newport to paint a great and formidable lady—"gild the tiger-lily," as Annan suggested, to the horror of Mr. Bruce.

She had been a very great lady. Traditionally she was still a social power. But she had seen everything, done every-

thing, and now, grown old and bad-tempered, she passed her declining days in making endless lists of people she did not want to know.

She was Annan's great-aunt. She had never forgiven him for becoming a common public entertainer.

Once Annan wrote her: "I've a list of people you have overlooked and whom you certainly would not wish to know."

Swallowing her dislike she wrote briefly requesting him to send her the list.

He sent her the New York Directory. The breach was complete.

"What can you offer me that I cannot offer myself?" Annan had inquired impudently, at their final interview.

"If you come out of that Greenwich gutter and behave as though you were not insane I can make you the most eligible young man in New York," she had replied.

He preferred his "gutter," and she washed her gem-laden hands of him.

But the curse clung to Barry Annan. "He's a nephew of Mrs. Magnelius Grandcourt," was still remembered against him when his name and his stories irritated the less successful among his confrères. The conclusion of the envious was that he had a "pull."

Bruce rose to go—a dark, sleek young man, trimmed in Van Dyck fashion, with long, acquisitive fingers and something in his suave manner that suggested perpetual effort to please. But his eyes were opaque.

"Tell my aunt," said Annan, "that if she'll behave herself she can come and live a sporting life with me in Governor's Place, and bring her cat, parrot, and geranium."

Bruce's shocked features were Annan's reward. He grinned through the rest of luncheon; was still grinning when he left the Pewter Mug.

Outside he met Coltfoot, hot and without appetite.

"It's ten degrees hotter down-town," grunted the latter.

"I'm empty, but the idea of food is repugnant. Where are you going, Barry?"

Annan had forgotten Eris. "I'm going to get out of town," he said. "I think I'll go out to Esperence and get some golf. We can be back by 7:30. Does it appeal to you, Mike?"

"It does, but I'm a business man, not a genius," said Coltfoot, sarcastically. "Did you ship your tramp girl home?"

"Oh, Lord, I clean forgot her," exclaimed Annan. "I've got to go back to Governor's Place. I must get rid of her before dinner——"

He was already moving toward Sixth Avenue. He turned and called back, "Eight o'clock, Mike!"

"All set," grunted Coltfoot.

An elevated train was Annan's choice. Preoccupied with the problem of Eris, he arrived at No. 3 Governor's Place before he had solved it. He didn't want to hustle her out. He couldn't have her there at eight o'clock.

Letting himself into the little brick house with a latch-key, he glanced along the corridor that led into the dining room, and saw Mrs. Sniffen in the butler's pantry beyond.

"Hello, Xantippe," he said; "how's the minx?"

Mrs. Sniffen placed a cup of hot clam broth upon a tray.

"Mr. Barry," she said in an oddly altered voice, "that child is sick. She couldn't keep her breakfast down."

"For heaven's sake——"

"I made her some broth for luncheon. No use at all. She couldn't keep it."

"What do you suppose is the matter with her?" he demanded nervously.

"Starvation. That's my idea, sir. She's that bony, Mr. Barry—no flesh on 'er except 'er 'ands and face,—and every rib to be seen plain as my nose!"

"You think she hasn't had enough to eat?"

"That, and the stuff she did eat—and what with walking the streets in this 'eat and sleeping out in the Park——"

Mrs. Sniffen hauled up the dumb-waiter and lifted off a covered dish.

"Toasted biscuit," she explained. "She can't a-bear anything 'earty, Mr. Barry."

"Well," he said, troubled, "what are we going to do with her?"

"That's for you to say, sir. You brought 'er 'ere."

He looked at Mrs. Sniffen and thought he detected a glimmer of satisfaction at his predicament.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"In bed, sir. She wants to dress and go away but I wouldn't 'ave it, Mr. Barry. Ambulance and 'ospital—that's what would 'appen next. And I 'ad a time with her, Mr. Barry. She said she was in the way and didn't want to give trouble. Hup she must get and h'off to the streets—But I 'ad 'er clothes I did, soaking in my tubs. . . . I let'her cry. I don't say it 'urt 'er, either. It 'elped, according to my way of thinking."

"She can't go if she's ill," he said; and looked at Mrs. Sniffen rather helplessly: "Do you think I'd better call in a doctor?"

"No, sir. I don't mind looking out for her. A little care is all she needs."

After a moment's frowning reflection: "It will be awkward to-night," he suggested.

Mrs. Sniffen's nose went up: "The ladies will 'ave to powder their faces in your room, Mr. Barry, and keep their 'ands off the piano."

He scowled at the prospect, then: "Here, give me that tray. I'll feed her myself."

He went upstairs with the tray, knocked at the closed door.

"Tuck yourself in," he called to her. "I've come to nourish you. All set?"

After a few moments: "Yes," she said calmly.

He went in. She sat huddled up in bed, swathed to the throat in a blue crash bath-robe.

"Well," he exclaimed gaily, "I hear unruly reports about you. What do you mean by demanding to get up and beat it?"

"I can't expect you to keep me here, Mr. Annan. I've been so much trouble already——"

"This is clam broth. I think you can keep it down. Sip it slowly. There are toasted crackers, too——"

He placed the tray on her knees.

"Now," he said, encouragingly, "be a sport!"

"I'll try."

The process of absorption was a slow one. She was very pale, and there were dark smears under her eyes. Her bobbed chestnut hair accented the slender purity of face and neck. Her hands seemed plump, but the bath-robe sleeve revealed a wrist and forearm much too thin.

"How does it feel?" he inquired, when the cup was empty.

Eris flushed. He saw that it embarrassed her to discuss bodily ills with him. Memory of her morning sickness deepened the painful tint in her cheeks:

"I don't know—know what to say to you,—I am so ashamed," she faltered.

"Eris!" he interrupted sharply.

She looked up, startled, her grey eyes brilliant with unshed tears, and saw the boyish grin on his face.

"No weeps," he said. "No apologies. It's no trouble to have you here. And here you remain, my gay and independent little friend, until you're fit to resume this disconcerting career of yours."

"I feel well enough to dress, if Mrs. Sniffen would give me my clothes."

"Where would you go?"

She made no reply.

"Look," he said, laying a hundred dollar bill on the

counterpane, "I did your story this morning. Here's your commission."

"Please—I can't——"

"Then I shall tear up my story and hand back to the *Planet* six hundred dollars that I need very badly."

She gave him such a piteous look that he laughed.

That matter settled, he relieved her of the tray, set it outside, and returned to seat himself in a rocking-chair beside the bed.

"When they pull the galley proofs of your story, would you like to read them, Eris?"

"Yes, if I may."

"Why not? It's your story."

"About—me?"

"It's the story of Eris. I call it 'The Gilded Apple.' It's sob-stuff. You begin to whimper after the first five hundred words. Then it degenerates into a snivel, and finally culminates in one heart-shattering sob."

She had begun to understand his flippancy. And now her smile glimmered responsive to his.

"If it's really about me," she said, "why is the story tragic?"

"I gave a tragic turn to our adventure," he explained.

"How?"

"I made myself out a bad sort. That was the situation,—a nice girl out o' luck, a rotter, a quick etching in of the Park situation—then through remorseless logic I finish you in the spotlight. You're done for; but I drift away through darkness, complacent, furtive, dangerous,—the bacteriological symbol of cosmic corruption,—the Eternal Cad."

From the first moment he had spoken to her in the Park the night before, his every word had fascinated her.

Never before had she been in contact with that sort of mind, with the vocabulary that was his, with words employed as he employed them. The things this man did with words!

Not that she always understood them, or their intent, or

the true intent of the man who uttered them. But this man's speech had seemed, suddenly, to have awakened her from sleep. And, awakened, everything he said vaguely excited her.

Blind, unknown forces within her stirred when he spoke. Her mind quivered in response; her very blood seemed stimulated. It was as though, shrouding her mind, vast cloudy curtains were opening to disclose undreamed of depths darkly pulsating with veiled brilliancy. Out, into interstellar space, lay the road to Truth.

She thought of her dream—of her wings. She lay looking at Annan, waiting for words.

"Why do you look at me so oddly?" he asked, smiling.

"I like what you say."

"About what?"

"About anything."

No man is proof against the surprise and pleasure of so naïve an avowal. Annan reddened, laughed, flattered and a little touched by his power to please so easily.

Looking at her very amiably and complacently, he wondered what effect he might have on this odd little pilgrim if he chose to exert himself. He could be really eloquent when he chose. It was good practice. It gave him facility in his stories.

Considering her, now, a half-smile touching his lips, it occurred to him that here, in her, he saw his audience in the flesh. This was what his written words did to his readers. His skill held their attention; his persuasive technique, unsuspected, led them where he guided. His cleverness meddled with their intellectual emotions. The more primitive felt it physically, too.

When he dismissed them at the bottom of the last page they went away about their myriad vocations. But his brand was on their hearts. They were his—these countless listeners whom he had never seen—never would see.

But he had spoken, and they were his—

He checked his agreeable revery. This wouldn't do. He was becoming smug. Reaction brought the inevitable note of alarm. Suppose his audience tired of him. Suppose he lost them. Chastened, he realised what his audience meant to him,—these thousands of unknown people whose minds he titivated, whose reason he juggled with, and whose heart-strings he yanked, his tongue in his cheek.

"Eris," he said with much modesty, "have you ever read any of my stuff?"

"No. May I?" she asked, shyly.

"I wish you would. I'd like to know what you think of it——" Always with her in his mind typifying the average reader,—"I'll get you my last Sunday's story——" He jumped up and sped away like a boy eager to exhibit some new treasure.

When he returned from his own room with the Sunday edition, Eris was lying back on her pillows. Something about the girl suddenly touched him.

"You poor little thing," he said, "I'm sorry you're down and out."

Her grey eyes regarded him with a sort of astonished incredulity, as though unable to comprehend why he should concern himself with so slight a creature as herself.

CHAPTER X

ABOUT eight that evening Annan knocked and entered, and found Eris intent on beef tea.

"How are you?" he asked in his winning, easy way, leaning down to look at her, and to inspect the broth.

Her awe of him and his golden tongue made her diffident. She tried now to respond to his light, informal kindness,—meet it part way.

She said, shyly, that she was quite recovered,—sat embarrassed under his amiable scrutiny, too bashful to continue eating.

"I'm having two or three people to dinner," he remarked, adjusting the camelia in his button-hole. "I hope we won't be noisy. If we keep you awake, pound on the floor."

She thought that humorous. They both smiled. She looked at the camelia in the lappel of his dinner jacket. He leaned over and let her smell it.

"Tell me," he said with that caressing accent of personal interest which in such men is merely normal affability, "do you really begin to feel better?"

She flushed, thanked him in a troubled voice. Mustering courage:

"I know I must be in the way here," she ventured; "I could get up and dress, if you'd let me, Mr. Annan——"

"Dress? And go away?"

"Yes."

"Go where?"

"You forget what you've given me. I have plenty of money to take a room."

"Do you mean that commission which brought me in five hundred dollars?"

"You pretend it is that way. . . . Yes, I mean that money."

"You funny child, I don't want you to get up and dress. You can't go yet. You're not in the way here."

She said, solemn and tremulous: "I'll never forget—your kindness—"

"When you're quite well again we'll talk over things," he said cheerily. He was thinking that if she found him so persuasive he'd have little trouble in starting her homeward.

The front doorbell rang. He got up, gave her arm a friendly little pat.

"I'll look in later," he said, "if you're still awake."

He went away, lightly. She followed him with fathomless grey eyes; listened to his steps descending the stairs—heard his gay greeting, the voices of arriving guests—women's laughter—the deeper voice of another man. After a little while she continued her interrupted dinner, gravely.

Mrs. Sniffen arrived presently. She seemed as starched, as rigid, as angular and prim as ever. But there was no disdainful tilt to her sharp nose. For the Mrs. Sniffen who now approached Eris was not the chilling automaton who had just admitted Annan's dinner guests with priggish disapproval.

Eris, shy of her, looked up at her in some apprehension.

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Sniffen with a wintry smile, "you *did* eat it all, didn't you? That's the way to grow 'ealthy and wealthy, not to say wise, isn't it, now? 'Ome vittles 'elps all 'urts, big or little, to my way of thinking."

"I enjoyed it so much, thank you," murmured Eris.

"And glad I am to 'ear you say it, Miss. 'Ave you quite finished?"

"Yes, thank you very much."

Mrs. Sniffen took the tray, hesitated by the bedside:

"I 'ope," she said, "that you will soon be well, Miss. . . . New York is just as bad as London, every bit! I know them both, Missy; and they're both uncommon nasty."

"I like New York," said Eris, shyly.

Mrs. Sniffen's nose went up with a jerk.

"And sorry I am to hear you say it," she retorted severely. "Them that has nice clean 'omes in the nice clean country-side don't realise their blessings, according to my way of thinking."

"Did you ever live in the country?" ventured Eris.

"Turnham Green, Miss."

"Where is that?"

"London. It was all dirt and gin and barracks when I was a kiddy. If I'd a pretty 'ome in the nice clean country-side like you, Miss, I'd be biding there yet, no doubt."

Eris shook her bobbed head: "I *had* to come where I *can* have a chance to learn something."

"And what, may I ask, Miss, would you learn 'ereabouts?" inquired Mrs. Sniffen with elaborate irony. "There's little to learn in New York that's good for a body. It's only a big, 'ot, dirty merry-go-round,—what with the outrageous noise and crowds and hurry and scurry, and wild capers and goings-on. No, Miss, you'll learn nothing 'elpful 'ere, depend upon it!"

Eris said, thoughtfully: "Only where are many people gathered is there the foundation for a real education. . . . Good and evil *are*. . . . Only truth matters. The important thing is to know."

"Who told you that?" demanded Mrs. Sniffen, amazed to hear such authoritative language.

"Nobody. But I'm quite sure it's so. Books alone *do* not educate. They are like roughage for cattle. There is *no* nourishment in them but they help to digest Truth. I wish to see and hear for myself, and learn to understand in my own way. . . . What *my* eyes and ears tell me is what I ought to think about and try to understand. And I believe

this is more important than reading in books what other people think of what *they* have seen and heard."

"God bless her baby-face!" exclaimed Mrs. Sniffen, exasperated. "Where does a kiddy find such notions, and the outlandish words for them, now? What are young folk coming to, any'ow, gypsying about the world as they please these crazy days? It's a bad world, Missy, and the worst of it settles in big cities like rancid grease in a sink. . . . Not that I'm the kind to push *my* nose into others' business. I know better. No, Miss, I've troubles enough to mind of my own, I 'ave. But when I see a polite and well mannered young person turn her back on 'ealth and 'ome to come to a nasty, rotten place like New York and sleep in the public parks at that, 'ow can I 'elp expressing my opinion? I *can't* 'elp expressing it. I'm bound to say you ought to go 'ome; and it would be a shame to me all my days if I 'adn't spoken!"

She seemed to be in a temper. She marched out with her tray, her starched skirts bristling, her nose high. Opening the door, she looked back wrathfully at Eris, hesitated, door-knob gripped:

"I'll 'ave some chicken for you before you sleep," she snapped; and closed the door with a distinct bang.

Downstairs, Annan had entertained three friends at dinner—Coltfoot, Rosalind Shore, and Betsy Blythe.

Of the making of moving pictures there is no end—until the sheriff enters. And Miss Blythe helped make as many pictures as her rather brief career had, so far, permitted.

She was to have her own company now. The people interested finally had "come across"; Betsy talked volubly at dinner. Gaiety, excitement and congratulations reigned and rained.

Rosalind Shore, another stellar débutante, already in her first season, had won her place in musical comedy. She was one of those dark-eyed, white-skinned, plumply grace-

ful girls, very lazy but saturated with talent. Which, however, would have meant little beyond the chorus unless her mother, an ex-professional, had literally clubbed musical and dramatic education into her.

Indolent, but immensely clever, little Miss Shore's girlhood had been one endless hell of maternal maulings. She was whipped if she neglected voice and piano; beaten if she shirked dramatic drill; kicked into dancing school, and spanked if she loitered late away from home. Yet she'd never have been anybody otherwise.

She had Jewish blood in her. She was distractingly pretty.

"Mom's a terror," she used to remark, reflectively. "She thumped me till I saw so many stars that I turned into one."

She sang the lead in "The Girl from Jersey"—into which a vigorous kick from her mother had landed her, to puzzle a public which never before had heard of Rosalind Shore.

The show ran until July and was to resume in September.

The girlhood of Bettina—or Betsy—Blythe, had been very different. She was one of a swiftly increasing number of well-born girls whom society had welcomed as débutantes, and who, after a first season, and great amateur success in the Junior League, had calmly informed her family that she had made a contract with some celluloid corporation to appear in moving pictures.

New York society was becoming accustomed to this sort of behaviour. It had to be. From the time that the nation's war-bugles sounded assembly at Armageddon, the younger generation had taken the bit between its firm teeth. Nothing had yet checked them. They still were running away.

In Annan's little drawing-room, where coffee had been served, the excited chatter continued to turn around Betsy's

brand new company,—this event being the reason for the dinner.

Every capitalist involved was discussed, and pulled to quivering pieces; every officer and director in the *Betsy Blythe Company, Inc.* was dissected under the merciless scrutiny of four young people who already had learned in New York to believe only what happened, and to turn deaf ears to mere words.

"Listen, Betsy," said Rosalind Shore, "Mom says you're all right with Cairo Cotton and Levant Tobacco behind you."

"The main thing," remarked Coltfoot, "is to begin in a businesslike way. Don't start off staggering under a load of overheads, Betsy. Don't let them take expensive offices. The people who'll use 'em would have to sit in a Mills Hotel if you didn't provide a loafing place for them.

"And don't spill money down the coal hole for a plant. When you need a studio, hire it for the length of time you expect to use it. Hire everything. Spend your money on the people who'll bring it back to you, not on human objects d'art and period furniture."

"I know," said Betsy, "but I can't control those things, can I?"

Annan said: "Perhaps you can. You know, socially, some of the people who are putting up the money. Harry Sneyd has to account to them. He's handling you and you can handle him."

"You can see to it," said Coltfoot, "that Levant Tobacco isn't used to pension a bunch of bums and dumb-bells. You can see to it that the money is spent where it ought to be spent. Your people have got real money. You can't buy a good story for nothing; you can't buy a good director or a good camera-man for nothing. Those are the people to pay."

Rosalind nodded: "And low pedal on art-directors and carpenters," she added. "I'm not so sure that I need all I

get. Scenery is on the toboggan, sister Bettina. You don't want expensive sets. Neither does your audience. It wants *you*. And it wants your story. So don't let your bunch start rebuilding devastated France in your back yard when a corner in a hall bedroom will do. . . . It will always do if the story and the acting go over. I don't have to tell you that, either."

"No interior ever made a picture," agreed Annan, "and no exterior ever saved one. But I'd go as far as I liked on the scenery that you don't have to pay God for."

Miss Blythe laughed: "Are you going to do a story for me, Barry?" she asked. "You promised—when you were in love with me."

"I am yet. But your people don't like sob-stuff any better than does Rosalind's audience."

"You don't have to squirt tears into every story you write," retorted Betsy. "Did you ever see me cry? There *are* people, Barry, who manage to get on without snivelling every minute."

"I never cry," remarked Rosalind; "Mom spanked the last tear out of me years ago." She rose and moved indolently to the piano.

Few professional pianists were better at her age,—thanks to "Mom," who had been a celebrated one.

Rosalind talked and idled at the keys, played, chattered, sang enchantingly, killed loveliness with a jest, slew beauty to light a cigarette, cursed with caprice the charming theme developing or, capriciously and tenderly protected, nourished and cared for it until it grew to exquisite maturity. Then strangled it with a "rag."

"You little devil," said Betsy, tremulous under the spell—"I wouldn't strangle my own offspring as you do!—I *couldn't*—" Emotion checked her.

Rosalind laughed: "It doesn't matter when one can have all the offspring one wants. . . . You'll never get on if you're too serious, Bettina mia."

"That's your friend Barry talking, not *you*," retorted Betsy. "He can get away with it—sitting all alone in a stuffy room where his readers can't see him writing sob-stuff with his tongue in his cheek. But you and I had better wear faces that can be safely watched, my Rosalinda child!"

"I want to ask you," said Rosalind, turning to Annan, "whether an audience can surmise what sort of private life one leads merely from watching one on the stage or screen."

"I think so, in a measure," he replied.

"Then it does pay to behave," concluded Betsy, walking to a mirror to inspect herself. "Not guilty—so far," she added, powdering her nose; "—am I, Barry?"

"Old Jule Cæsar's wife was a schmeer in comparison," he agreed.

"I'll tell you, young man," she remarked, "I've found the Broadway atmosphere healthier than it is in some New York younger sets."

"Is that one answer to why do young men haunt stage doors?" inquired Coltfoot.

"You miserable cynic," retorted Betsy, "the sort of young man who does that belongs in the sets I mentioned."

"Anyway," added Rosalind, with lazy humour, "you and Barry are spending a perfectly good evening as close to the stage as you can get. Why?"

"Why," added Betsy, "do men prefer women of the stage?"

"Good God," said Coltfoot, "take any Sunday supplement and compare the faces of Newport and Broadway. That's one reason out of hundreds."

"Few men chase a face that makes them ache," added Barry, "even if the atmosphere in some sets smells of the stage door. . . . Tell me, beautiful Betsy, why you don't canter about very much in your own gold-plated and exclusive social corral?"

"Because," she replied tranquilly, "I have a better time

with the people I meet professionally . . . mavericks from the gold-plated corral like you, for instance. You and Mike and Rosalind are more amusing than Sally Snitface or Percy Pinhead. And you're far more moral."

"I wonder if I am moral," mused Rosalind, shaking the cracked ice in her glass.

"God, your mother and your native laziness incline you that way," said Barry, gravely. "You're better than good; you're apathetic. Inertia will see you through."

"It takes energy to be a devil," added Coltfoot. "Your perfect angel snoozes on a cloud. She's too lazy to walk. That's why she grew wings and why you take taxi-cabs, Rosalind."

"I do. I use my legs sufficiently on the stage, thank you. Also, I admit I like to snooze."

"Angel," said Betsy from the mirror, "lend me your lipstick." And, to Annan: "May I ascend to the rear room and make up properly?"

"No, go into my room."

"But there's no dressing table there——" starting to go.

"You can't go up there," he repeated. "I mean it."

The girl turned: "Oh, is there a lady there?" she asked with that flippant freedom fashionable in certain sets, but mostly due to ignorance.

"There is," said Annan, coolly.

Rosalind did not believe it, but she said carelessly: "That's rather disgusting if it's true."

"It's true," said Coltfoot. He sketched the story. Rosalind, who had been sagging picturesquely, sat up straight. Betsy listened incredulously at first, then with knitted brows.

"I mean to ship her back to the old farm," added Annan. "She needs a wet-nurse——"

"I want to see her," said Miss Blythe abruptly.

"Well, she isn't on exhibition," returned Annan in a dry voice.

"Can't I see her?"

"Put yourself in her place. Would *you* feel comfortable, lying in the guest bed of a strange man? And would *you* care to have a fashionably gowned girl come flying in to stare at you?"

Betsy gazed at him scarcely listening. She turned to Rosalind:

"If she's got as much nerve as that, couldn't you or I do something?"

"All right," nodded Rosalind.

"You'd better let her go home," said Annan. "She has pluck and perhaps talent, but she hasn't the sense to take care of herself. You let her alone, Bet, do you hear?"

Betsy's nose went up. "Mind your business, Barry. If she works for me she needn't worry."

"You'd better take her on, then," said Rosalind. "Mom bangs me around so that I'm too groggy to look out for anybody's morals except my own."

Betsy came up to Annan and put her hands on his shoulders:

"Let me see her; I shan't eat her. I might use her. She's a sandy kid."

"She's twenty. She told me so," he retorted.

"It's cruel to ship her back to the cows, Barry, when she's gone through such a rotten novitiate. I think you're taking a great responsibility if you use that easy and persuasive tongue of yours to send her back to the stupidity she ran away from. Don't you?"

Rosalind said to her: "There's no point in your pawing Barry Annan. I've done it. He lets you. Then he does what he pleases."

Annan grinned faintly: Betsy suddenly slapped his face, not hard.

"That complacent smirk!" she said, exasperated.

Before Annan guessed what she was about, she turned and

ran upstairs. He followed, too late. The guest-room door opened and slammed, and he heard the key turn inside.

He returned to the drawing-room, laughing but irritated.

"Little meddlesome devil," he said, "talking to *me* of responsibility! Here's where I wash my hands of the Eris kid. It's Betsy's deal now."

It was.

Eris, listening to the laughter and music below, lying wide-eyed on her pillow, sat up startled and wider yet of eye when a scurry and flurry of scented skirts, followed by the clash of a swiftly locked door landed Betsy Blythe at her bedside.

She stared at the breathless vision of flushed beauty, too astounded to think of herself and her position.

Down on the bed's edge dropped Miss Blythe, radiant, cheeks and eyes still brilliant from her victory.

"I'm Betsy Blythe," she said. "I heard about you. How fine and plucky of you! What a perfectly rotten experience! . . . Tell me your name, won't you?"

"Eris Odell," said the girl mechanically, still under the spell of this sudden brightness which seemed to fill the whole room with rose colour.

"My dear," said Betsy, "please forgive me for coming in on my head. Mr. Annan tried to prevent me. You mustn't blame him. But when I heard how plucky you are I simply had to come up and tell you that I'm going to ask my manager to take you on. I haven't seen our first script. They're doing the continuity now. But I'm sure there must be something—something, at least, to start you going—so you won't need to sleep in the park—you poor child——"

She impulsively caressed one of the hands that lay on the quilt; retained it, looking at Eris with increasing interest and kindness. Suddenly, for one fleeting moment, the subtle warning that a pretty woman feels in discovering greater beauty in another, touched Betsy Blythe. And passed.

"I'm in pictures," she said, smilingly. "I should have told you that first. I have my own company now. When you are quite recovered, will you come and see me?"

"Yes, thank you." The eyes of Eris were great wells of limpid grey; her lips, a trifle apart, burned deep scarlet.

"You are *so* pretty," said Betsy,—"do you test well?"

"They thought so."

"The Crystal Film people?"

"Yes."

"I'll have Mr. Sneyd give you another test. He'll make you up. Or I will. You know, of course, that it won't be a part that amounts to anything."

"Oh, yes."

"But it will be a part. We'll carry you—not like an extra, you see—" Betsy rose, went over to a little desk, wrote her address and brought it to Eris.

"You do forgive me for coming in to see you this crazy way, don't you?"

"Oh, yes—yes, I do—" Suddenly the grey eyes flashed tears.

"You sweet child!" said Betsy Blythe, stooping over her. "You're nice. A woman can tell, no matter what a pig of a man might think. I like you, Eris. I *want* you to get on. I'd love to have you make good some day." She added naïvely: "—If only to put Barry Annan's nose out of joint."

Eris had covered her wet lashes with her fore-arm. Now she removed it.

"Mr. Annan has been wonderful," she said in a tear-congested voice.

"Three cheers!" said Betsy, laughing. "You're a loyal youngster, aren't you? Everybody likes Barry Annan. Several love him. But *you* mustn't," she added with a gravity that deceived Eris.

"Oh, no," she said hurriedly, "I wouldn't think of such a thing."

At that Betsy's clear laughter rang out in the room. Eris blushed furiously; then, suddenly and swiftly *en rapport*, laughed too.

"He's so nice and so spoiled," said Betsy. "That bland grin of his!—and he *is* clever—oh, very. He knows how to make your heart jump when he writes. In private character he's kind but mischievous. He'll experiment with a girl if she'll let him. It interests him to try cause and effect on us. Don't *you* let him. He has that terrible talent for swift intimacy. That caressing courtesy, that engaging and direct interest he seems to take in whoever he is with, means no more than a natural and kindly consideration for everybody. It misleads some women. I don't mean *he* does, intentionally. Only any man, seeing a pretty girl inclined to be flattered, is likely to investigate further. I don't blame him. We do it, too, don't we?"

"I never did," said Eris naïvely.

Betsy's smile faded and she gave Eris a sharp look. Then, abruptly, she took both her hands and sat regarding her.

"I'll tell you something," she concluded, finally. "Men won't fool you: you'll fool them."

"I shan't try to," said Eris.

"That's how you'll do it. . . . You're unusual; do you realize it? What is it that interests you most?"

"I want to learn."

"I thought so. I've known one or two girls like you. Pretty ones. . . . Almost as pretty as you, Eris. They raise the devil with men."

"How?" asked Eris, astonished.

"Merely by being what they are,—absolutely normal under all conditions. Men are completely fooled. To a man, feminine youth and beauty mean a depthless capacity for sex sentiment. My dear, you have very little of that sort. . . . Or, if you have any, it's the normal amount and is reserved for the great moment in life."

"What is the great moment in life?" asked Eris.

"Love, I suppose."

"I do not think I shall have time for it," said Eris, thoughtfully.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Betsy, laughing. "Don't be un-human!"

"Oh, no. . . . I only mean that it's—it's a thing which has not—occurred. . . . I have not thought about it, much."

"Nor wished for it?"

"Oh, no."

"Still," said Betsy, smiling, "we're made for it, you know. . . . That is, if we're quite healthy."

"I suppose so," said Eris absently.

After a silence Betsy pressed her hands, rose, looked down at her with friendly gaze.

"I ought to join the others. You won't forget to come? Please don't: I'd like to have you with us. Good night, Eris. Get well quickly!"

As she was going out: "Make my peace with Barry Annan," she added. "I'm in dutch with that young man."

The slangy girl really was not. Annan, at the piano, pounding out a rag while Rosalind and Coltfoot danced, merely called out to her that the responsibility for Eris Odell was hers from that moment and if they ever found the girl in the river it was none of his doings.

Betsy smiled scornfully: "I'd trust that girl anywhere," she said. "Some day a girl like Eris will teach you a few new steps in the merry dance of life, Barry."

"What new steps?" He continued playing but looked curiously up at Betsy, who had come over beside him.

"You're so cocksure of yourself," she said, "aren't you, dear?"

"You mean I'm a prig?"

"No, just a very clever, good-looking boy with kind instincts and a fatal facility. You think you're real. You

think you write realisms. You'll come up against the real thing some day. *Then——*"

"Yes, yes, go on!"

"Why," she said, smiling at him, "then you'll bump your complacent head, my dear. *That* will be reality. And maybe you'll know it again when you run into it. Maybe it will rid you of that bland grin."

"That's a melting smile, not a grin, darling,"—pounding away vigorously. "But tell me about this 'real thing' that I'm to crack my noodle on."

"A girl, ducky."

"Sure. I'm cracked already on 'em all."

"The one I mean is named Nemesis and she'll knock your silly head off. . . . Like that child upstairs, for example."

"She's got a Greek name, too. I'd better remember to 'fear the Greeks'—yes?"

"Little Eris could double *you* up."

"Wh-at?"

"I don't mean Eris in particular, dear friend. But one of her species."

"What's her species?"

"You, a writer!—and you haven't even doped her out!" "I have, however," he contradicted her tranquilly.

"All right. Analyse her for me."

"Quantitatively?"

"Certainly."

"Here she is then: clean, plucky, uneducated, obstinate, immature; and, like any other girl, perfectly pliable when properly handled by an expert."

"*You*?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, tweetums——"

"You don't have to say it. But I'm glad you think you're an expert. For it's going to be *that* kind of girl who will some day put a crimp in you, Barry, and teach you what you don't know anything about."

"What's that, Rose of my Harem?"

"Women," she said maliciously, "and you make a living by writing about them. And the Great American Ass believes you know what you're writing about!"

Coltfoot telephoned for his car after midnight and drove Annan's fair guests homeward.

Annan, born with a detestation for sleep, locked up and put out the lights unwillingly.

As he passed Eris' door on his way to his room, he halted a moment, listening.

"Are you awake, Eris?" he asked in a modulated voice.

"Yes," she answered.

"That's fine!" he exclaimed. "May I come in for a moment?"

"Yes, please."

Her light was on. She was sitting up in bed. When he caught the first glimpse of the radiant face, flushed with happy excitement, he scarcely recognised the pinched and pallid girl of the park. In his astonishment he thought her the prettiest thing he remembered ever seeing; stood silent, quite overwhelmed by the unfamiliar beauty of the girl.

Entirely unconscious of admiration, she smiled enchantingly—a piquant and really charming picture in her bathrobe and bobbed hair.

"Thank you so much," she said, "for asking Miss Blythe to see me. She pretended you wouldn't let her come, but I knew she was joking. Miss Blythe asked me to join her own company. I simply can't sleep for thinking of it."

He came over to the bedside and took a chair.

"Eris," he said, "I really didn't want Miss Blythe to see you. I thought you ought to go home when you recover."

She looked at him, startled.

"Maybe I'm wrong," he said, "but I think so, still."

After a silence: "You *are* wrong. . . . But I know you mean it kindly."

"Hang it all, of course I do. You're an unusual girl——"

Betsy's words, she remembered—"and you interest me; and I like you. . . . And I know something about Broadway. . . . It worries me a little—the combination of you and Broadway."

"I—worry *you*?"

"In a way. . . . Your inexperience. . . . And you don't know men."

"No, I don't know men."

"Well—there you are," he said, impatiently.

Yes, there she was,—in the guest-room bed of one of them.

She said, tranquilly: "It is kind of you to be interested in me. I feel it deeply, Mr. Annan. It seems wonderful to me, that a man so—a man like yourself—should have—have time to care what happens to a perfectly strange nobody. . . . But I *can't* go home. . . . Not yet. . . . I shouldn't care to live if I can't have an opportunity to learn. . . . So—so that's *that*."

He, finally, laughed. "Is it, Eris?"

"Yes," she said, smiling at him, "I'm afraid it is."

"And that's *that*," he concluded.

"Yes, really it is."

"All right." He got up, stood fumbling with a cigarette. "All right, Eris. If '*that's*' the verdict, I guess I was wrong. I guess you know your business."

"No. But I hope to."

"You fascinatingly literal kid!—" He burst out laughing, went over and shook hands with her.

"Somebody else will have to milk the cows and feed the chickens. That's plain as the permanent curls on your bobbed head, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said, laughing, "—and you're so funny!"

"Oh, I'm a great wit," he admitted. "Well, little pilgrim, you require sleep if I don't. . . . I think I'll go in and start a story. . . . Or read. . . . Your story is just beginning, isn't it?"

She ventured a timid jest: "You finished my story for me, didn't you?"

"I did. When it's published, and you read it, you'll never stop guying me, I suppose."

She still ventured pleasantries: "So you didn't tell how I left the Park and walked straight into an engagement, did you?"

"My dear, I bumped you off to sneak-music. It goes, you know, with my clients. They wouldn't stand for what Miss Blythe did. Neither would the *Planet*. I'd get the hook."

They both were laughing when he said good-night.

He went into his room but did not light the lamp. For a long while he sat by the open window looking out into the darkness of Governor's Place.

It probably was nothing he saw out there that brought to his lips a slight, recurrent smile.

The bad habit of working late at night was growing on this young man. It is a picturesque habit, and one of the most imbecile, because sound work is done only with a normal mind.

He made himself some coffee. A rush of genius to the head followed stimulation. He had a grand time, revelling with pen and pad and littering the floor with inked sheets unnumbered and still wet. His was a messy genius. His plot-logic held by the grace of God and a hair-line. Even the Leaning Tower of Pisa can be plumbed; and the lead dangled inside Achilles' tendon when one held the string to the medulla of Annan's stories.

He rose at his usual early hour, rather pallid, and parched by too many pipes.

When he left the house for down town, Mrs. Sniffen reported Eris still sound asleep. So Annan went away to deposit seven thousand words with Coltfoot.

"Off the bat just like that," he said, tossing the untidy bundle onto Coltfoot's desk.

"You mean that you did this story last night after ~~we~~ left?" demanded Coltfoot.

"That's what I do, Mike,—sometimes. And sometimes I'm two or three weeks on this sort of thing. I think I'll go back and do another. I feel like it."

"Probably," remarked the other, "this is punk."

"Probably not," said Annan serenely. "Are you lunching?"

"Probably not if I read this bunk first. Is it really up to your worst level?"

"Your readers will wail like a bunch of banshees over it. It's dingy, squalid, photographic. What more does the Great American Ass require?"

"That's his fodder," admitted Coltfoot. "Now g'wan outa here, you licensed push-cart bandit! . . . By the way, how's the park-bencher this morning?"

"Asleep when I left the house." He seated himself sideways on Coltfoot's desk:

"Mike, do you know she's exceedingly pretty?"

"How should I know? . . . But trust you to pick that kind—"

"I forgot that you've never seen her. Well, last night after you left I stopped to look in on her, and, honestly, her beauty startled me. She's beautiful thick chestnut hair and fine grey eyes, and the loveliest mouth—its expression is charming!—and really, Mike, her arms and hands are delicate enough for a Psyche. Maybe she milked and fed ducks, but I can't see any of the hick about her—"

He smiled, made one of his characteristic, graceful gestures: "It's funny, but there she is. And yet, I'd not venture to use her in a story 'as is.' Because my wise guys wouldn't believe in her. I'd be damned as a romanticist. And you'd chuck me out of the Sunday Edition."

Coltfoot sat gazing up at him for a few moments, then put on his reading-spectacles and pawed at a wad of proof.

"I'm going to chuck you out of this office anyway," he grunted.

Exactly why Annan chose to lunch at home did not occur to him until, arriving there, Mrs. Sniffen handed him a note and announced the departure of Eris Odell.

"What!" he said irritably, "has she gone?"

"About eleven, Mr. Barry. And would you believe that child would ask me to take five dollars for making her bed? And she with scarce a penny. What's one 'undred and twenty dollars in New York? I could ha' birched her——"

"Give me the note," he interrupted, disappointed. Because that was why he had come home to lunch,—to see this youngster who had so ungratefully and rudely departed.

He went upstairs to his room, seated himself, slit the envelope with a paper cutter, and leisurely but sulkily unfolded the sheet of note paper within.

A hundred-dollar bank note fell to the floor.

"Dear Friend," he read,—a rural form of address that always annoyed Annan,—"please do not be offended if I leave without awaiting your return. Because I feel keenly that I ought not to impose upon your great kindness any longer.

"I am at a loss to express my gratitude. Your goodness has stirred my deepest sensibilities and has imprinted upon my innermost mind a sense of obligation never to be forgotten.

"I shall always marvel that so well known and successful a man could find time to trouble himself with the personal embarrassment of an insignificant stranger.

"What you have done for me is so wonderful that I can only feel it but cannot formulate my feeling in words.

"And thank you for the hundred dollars. But please, *please* understand that I could not keep it.

"Confident in the promise of Miss Blythe, I shall venture

to take the room that sometimes I have taken for a single night. It is at 696 Jane Street.

“So good-bye—unless you ever would care to see me again—and thank you with a heart very full, dear Mr. Annan.

“Yours sincerely,

“ERIS.”

CHAPTER XI

ANNAN had every intention of going to Jane Street. But Barry Annan was that kind of busy man who takes the most convenient diversion in the interims of work.

He wrote a note to Eris, promising to stop in very soon; but week-ends interfered. Then, in August, a house party at Southampton, another in Saratoga for the races, and the remaining two weeks trout fishing in the Maine forests, convicted him as the sort of social liar everybody understands.

But Eris was not anybody yet. She did not understand. There was not a single evening she had not waited for him, not daring to go out lest she miss him.

Only when the Betsy Blythe Company departed on location did Eris abandon hope and pack her little satchel for the Harlem & Westchester train.

Annan, at Portage Camps, had a letter from Betsy Blythe on location, dated from Cross River in Westchester.

“Our first picture is called ‘The Real Thing,’ ” she wrote, “and we’re shooting all our exteriors while the foliage lasts. This is a wonderful spot for that—everything within a mile—and perfect weather.

“Frank Donnell is my director—a dear! And Stoll is our camera-man—none better in the profession. Our people are pretty good,—one or two miscast, I fear,—and we can get all the extras we can use, right here,—it’s hick-stuff, my dear, and there’s poods of it at hand.

“My people bought Quilling’s novel for \$50,000. You should have heard Levant scream! But Dick Quilling can’t

be had for nothing, and Crystal Gray herself did the continuity.

"I'm afraid to tell you how our footage stands—and no interiors so far. But our sets will be few and will cost nothing.

"Why should Tobacco shriek? We have our release already through the Five Star, and we get back our cost of production. Isn't that sound business?

"Besides, five weeks should be sufficient for studio shooting. We get the Willow Tree Studios. Frank Donnell will do the cutting in the Lansing Laboratories, and use their projection rooms.

"I've a peach of a part if I'm up to it. Nobody else near me. Wally Crawford plays opposite—a very trying kid—the good-looking, smarty, rather common sort—all plastered hair and eyelashes—you know?

"The other principals will do.

"I'm *very* happy, Barry. I could even believe you sincere if you were here—I mean believe it for an hour or two of Westchester moonlight.

"I write Dad and Mother every night. They've been out here in the car several times. Rosalind motored out Sunday. We had an awfully good time.

"Don't you want to come up before we strike our tents and beat it for the Bronx?

"Yours contentedly,

"BETSY B.

"P. S.—I forgot to say that your little protégée, Eris, does extremely well whatever is required of her. She plays one of those self-conscious rustics, half educated, vain, credulous, and with a capacity for a world of mischief. I'm a pig, I suppose, but I'm glad Crystal Gray cut the part to slivers. Eris has no experience and no training, of course, but she screens well, is intelligent, and does exactly what Frank Donnell tells her to do.

"She comes, diffidently, to sit in my hammock with me

after dinner, and curls up like a tired kitten. But, like a kitten, she is receptive, responsive, ready to play or be talked to—an unspoiled, generous nature already actively forming a character the daily development of which is very interesting to watch.

"I told her I was writing to you. She asks, *very* shyly, to be 'faithfully remembered.'

"I, also, but *not* faithfully.

"BETSY."

CHAPTER XII

A SHORT story every Sunday would have grilled the brains out of anybody, even a born story teller.

Perhaps quality might have suffered; perhaps the thread of invention would have snapped had not Annan's contract with the *Planet* ended with September.

He had done twenty stories for *Coltfoot* in six months. Those stories made Annan. It had finally come to—"Have you read Barry Annan in this week's number?" That, and a growing hostility always certain to be aroused by recognition, were making of the young man a personage.

From the very beginning, scarce knowing why, he had avoided the shallow wallow of American "letters," where the whole herd roots and snouts—literati, critics, public,—gruffing and snuffling for the legendary truffle disinterred and gobbled up so long—so long ago.

Already the younger aspirants hailed him. Already the dreary brethren of the obvious stared disapproval.

The dull read him as they read everything. It takes all kinds of pasture to keep a cow in cud. She chews but never criticises.

Realists peered at him evilly and askance. His description of swill didn't smell like the best swill. There were mutterings of "heretic."

The "small-town" school found fault with his microscope. Waste nothing—their motto—had resulted in a demand for their rag-carpets. But here was a man who saved only a handful of threads and twisted them into a phrase which seemed to do the duty of entire chapters. No, the small-town school took a sniff at Annan and trotted on down the alley.

As for the Romanticists, squirming and writhing and

weaving amid their mess of properties and scenery, what did they want of the substance when the shadow cost nothing?

No, Annan didn't fit anywhere. He was just a good story-teller.

Outside that, his qualifications for writing fiction were superfluous, from an American audience's point of view, for, to please that audience, he didn't have to write good English, he didn't have to be intellectual, cultured, witty, or a gentleman. But these unnecessary addenda did not positively count against him.

He talked over the situation with Coltfoot, who was loath to lose him and muttered of moneys.

"No, Mike," concluded Annan, "I've had my romp in your kindly columns. You let me train there. I feel fit for the fight, now. I'm on tip-toe, all pepped up."

"How much do you want then?" demanded Coltfoot, unconvinced.

"Nothing. I've about a million things I want to try——"

"Bosco," nodded the other wearily;—"I know. But you'll end in a Coney Island show, matched against all comers to eat twenty-five feet of sausages in twenty-five minutes. . . . Do a serial for us. We've never tried it but I believe the newspaper is destined to put the magazine out of business. I'll take a chance, anyway. Will you?"

"Maybe. I'm going to do a story—a kind of novel—a thing—something——"

"I'll take it without sample or further identification. It may cost me my job. Are we on?"

"No, you crazy Irishman. Let me alone, I tell you. I may change my mind and try a play, or a continuity direct,—hang it all, I might even burst into verse. Do you want some poems?" he threatened.

"No," replied Coltfoot calmly, "but I'll take them."

"I'll do one farewell article for you. I'll do it to-night. But that ends it."

"How about the poems?"

"You're very kind," said Annan laughing. "It's just the yoke, Mike. It hasn't galled, but let me drop it for a while. . . . That stuff I did for you—well, it's out of my system. I don't care, now, whether it's good or bad; I shan't do any more anyway—"

"Your public asks for it."

"I'm through—"

"They want *that*?"

"Well, I won't do any more. I don't want to. I can't. I don't think that way any longer. Damn it, I've gone on—"

"They haven't!"

"Let 'em stay put, then," growled Annan.

"You mean you are going to abandon your public?"

"I move. If they don't want to follow—"

"No writer can afford to abandon his public," said Coltfoot, seriously.

Annan, also serious, said slowly: "The Masters we scribblers try to follow went that way. They went *on*. Few followed them all the way. . . . Poe wrote only *one* 'Tales of the Grotesque'; Kipling wrote only one 'Plain Tales from the Hills'; Scott one 'Ivanhoe,' Hawthorne one 'Scarlet Letter'; Cooper, Dickens, Thackeray only *the* one each. . . . And there was only one 'Hamlet.' . . . And but one 'Inferno.' . . . And one 'Song of Songs.' . . . And one 'Iliad.' "

He shrugged: "So maybe, in my own cheap little job I have hit my high-spot with those stories of yours. . . . Maybe. . . . But I'm going on, I'm going to write what I please if it costs me my last reader."

Coltfoot made his last effort: "Dumas wrote 'Twenty Years After'?"

"There was only one 'Three Musketeers.' "

"Sure. . . . The greatest romance ever written. . . . Sure. . . . All right, Barry. . . ."

That evening Annan made himself some black coffee and

wrote his farewell article for *Coltfoot*. It took him only half an hour and it left him too much keyed up for sleep. He called his article: "The Great American Ass."

"September flowers gone to seed," it began, deceptively; "withering leaves and dry dirt—the Park and Fifth Avenue at their shabbiest. Streets torn up, piles of sand, escaping steam, puddles of mortar, red flag and red lantern crowning the débris, and the whole mess stinking of illuminating gas: heat, dirt, noise—unnecessary, incessant, hellish noise—seven million sweating people milling like maggots in the midst—your New York, fellow citizens, on an unwashed platter!"

"Of the metropolis itself there is scarcely any beauty—a church here, an office-building there, one or two statues, a few dwellings:

"In the metropolis there is more beauty than anywhere else in the world. It is to be found in the faces and figures of its women and children.

"For the beauty of woman is as usual in New York as it is rare in the capitals of Europe. Without the charm, symmetry, vivacity of the faces of her women, New York would be, indeed, the ugliest, dingiest, and stupidest metropolis in the world.

"Flower-like her pretty women bloom all over the arid, treeless agglomeration of mortar and metal, serene amid the asinine clamour; smiling, piquant, nourished by suffocating heat, flourishing in arctic cold, hardy, healthy, wonderful in the vast abiding place of the Great American Ass,—New York.

"Here is his stronghold and he runs it to suit himself. Any woman manages her own flat far better.

"For your New Yorker comes of an untidy race, knowing neither civic nor national pride in the proper sense.

"His forefathers cleared forests and lived among charred stumps. He is aware of no inborn necessity for beauty.

"New York is the wastrel among states. Her sons pollute

streams; her country roads are vistas of bill-boards; even the 'eternal' hills that line the Hudson crumble daily into cement. Here the Great American Ass found a Paradise and created a Dump. He ravages, stamps out, obliterates the lovely face of nature,—digs, burns, crushes, tramples. Hundreds of miles of ghastly, charred forests mark the trail of the Great American Ass among his mountains. Filthy sea-waves dash his refuse upon his shores.

"Loud, wanton, strident, and painted his metropolis sprawls, unbuttoned, on the island leering at ugliness and devastation. And, in her dirty ears, the ceaseless and complacent braying of the Great American Ass. Her lover, Bottom, the eternal New Yorker.

"Any woman's kitchen is cleaner and her household run with greater economy.

"Poor bread—when France can teach him what bread really is—poorly prepared food, making candy eaters of an entire people—an alimentary viciousness unknown where food is properly cooked and properly eaten.

"A *poor* people, you New Yorkers, spite of your money—poorly educated, bodily and mentally; poor in physique; poor sportsmen who tolerate professionalism as your popular sport; too poor in spirit to submit to universal service for the common weal.

"So poor that your laws are made for you by the most recently settled and most ignorant section of the nation.

"The 'Centre of Population,' with its incubus of half educated women, prescribes your bodily and your moral menu. And you become a metropolis of moonshiners.

"What are you, Manhattan? Ruins already, alas, to build upon—the Yankee Ninevah trodden by an ass less wild.

"And yet the endless caravans continue. Still, to New York come all things, all people. And, alas, Youth comes too, and all afire to see and learn and achieve. High ideals, high hopes, vigour, courage, face to face with the Great American Ass enthroned amid the débris.

"Youth floundering in the dump-heap bares a clean sword to hew its way to beauty. And strikes a shower of ashes. There is no sympathy; no audience for beauty in New York.

"Dull eyes look on, dull minds weary. There is official inquiry as to the purpose of 'these here art artists.' The waiter, taxi-driver, janitor, gambler of yesterday are the arbiters of Art on Broadway to-day.

"It is not a sword that Youth needs in New York; it is a gas-mask. And, somewhere, Destiny is already mixing mortar and Fate is baking bricks for that coming temple that shall stand upon the futile ruins where, some day, shall be disinterred the fossil bones of the Great American Ass."

Annan sent it to Coltfoot with a note:

"This is a crazy article. You don't have to use it."

Coltfoot used it. A few people laughed, a few protested, the Middle West was angry, and the owners of the *Planet* told Coltfoot to be more careful.

But the majority of New Yorkers liked the article, and grinned, having been overfed on "our fair city" stuff.

Besides, the tendency of the times was toward the unpleasant.

Stilton and caviar are acquired tastes.

That night Annan made himself some black coffee and began his first novel, "The Cloud."

About three o'clock in the morning he tore up what he had written and smoked another pipe.

"Oh, the rotten start!" he yawned, conscious that inwardly he was all a-tremble with creative power,—like a boiler that taxes its safety valve.

The young vigour in him laughed its menace. All the insolent certainty of youth was in his gesture as he flung the torn manuscript into the fireplace.

That night he embarked upon the sea of dreams. He sel-

dom dreamed. But this night tall clouds loomed in his sleep and an ocean rolled away. His ship plunged on, always on, he at the helm.

Far upon the storm-wastes pitched a tiny craft under naked poles, hurled toward destruction. As he drove past her under thundering sail he saw—for the first time in any dream—the ghost of Eris lashed to the little helm, her death-white face fixed, her gaze intent upon the last fading star.

He awoke calling to her, the strain of nightmare an agony in his throat, and shaking all over. But now, awake, he couldn't understand what had so terrified him in his dream, why he quivered so.

"I suppose I thought she couldn't ride out the storm in that cockle-shell," he muttered, gazing at the grey warning of dawn outside his windows.

The first sparrow chirped. Annan pulled the quilt over his ears, disgusted.

"I ought to look up that kid," he thought.

It was his last conscious effort until he awoke for another day.

CHAPTER XIII

ANNAN, leaving the Province Club—one of the remaining threads attaching him to the conventional world—espied Coltfoot.

They had not met in weeks, and they shook hands affectionately.

“What are you doing these days, Mike?” inquired Annan.

“Hunting geniuses as a dog hunts fleas. What’s your latest effort, Barry?”

“No effort. I am awaiting with composure the birth of my great novel.”

“Any good?” demanded the other with professional curiosity.

“It’s good enough to sell in Heaven,” replied Annan modestly.

“Not so good then,” grunted Coltfoot. “And if that’s all you’re doing this afternoon, why not saunter along with me?”

“Gladly, but whither?”

“To 57th Street. Frank Donnell is running Betsy Blythe’s stuff this afternoon. Don’t you want to see it?”

“Why, yes—of course.”

Annan signalled a club taxi in waiting; they rolled away together, Coltfoot directing the driver to go to “The Looking Glass”—quite the most charming little motion picture house yet erected on Manhattan Island.

“Albert Wesly Smull built it,” remarked Coltfoot. “It’s a gem.”

“Isn’t Smull one of that bunch of sports behind Betsy Blythe?”

"One of 'em. I hear 'The Looking Glass' is the first of a string of picture houses that Smull means to build and operate."

"I supposed that Wall Street men had learned to fight shy of pictures," remarked Annan.

"You can't scare them away. It's a bigger gamble than their own. That's why."

They stopped at the pretty bit of colonial architecture on Fifty-Seventh Street, and entered a private corridor where an elevator whisked them to the third floor.

There were a number of people in Frank Donnell's office.

Donnell, prematurely grey, smooth shaven and with the manners of a gentleman, greeted Coltfoot who, in turn, made him known to Annan.

Other men spoke to them, Dick Quilling—whose novel had been filmed for Miss Blythe—a dapper, restless young man, eternally caressing a small and pointed moustache with nicotine-stained fingers; Stoll, celebrated camera man, silent, dreamy and foreign; David Zanger, art-director, a stumpy, fat man with no eye lashes, a round, pock-marked face, frayed cuffs and dirty fingers.

Annan, looking about, discovered Betsy Blythe, returned a smile for her swift frown, and went over to make his peace for his long neglect of her.

"Where's that blooming continuity you were to do for me?" she demanded irritably.

"I'm still evolving it, most beautiful of women——"

"Gentle liar, you've never given it another thought. I suppose you can't help gazing at people as though you mean what you say, can you, Barry?" And, to the man seated beside her—"You remember Mr. Annan, Albert?"

Albert Wesly Smull got up—an elaborately-groomed man of ruddy, uncertain age. His expression, always verging on a smile, might have been agreeable if less persistent. He had a disturbing habit of smiling rather fixedly at people out of small, red-brown eyes.

He knew Annan by sight, it appeared. They shook hands politely.

"I used to see you in the Patroon's Club," said Mr. Smull. "I know your aunt very well," he added with his sanguine smile.

"Probably better than I do," said Annan. "I'm socially disinherited, you know."

Smull's reddish-brown eyes clung to Annan like two gadflies.

"Your aunt is a very wonderful old lady," he said; "—a great power in New York under the old régime—" His eyes began to move, leaving Annan and turning toward the window where people were grouped.

"The grand dame is done for in this town," remarked Betsy. "She's as important in these days as a stuffed Dodo."

Annan caught sight of Rosalind Shore near the window; Betsy shrugged her congé; he went across to Rosalind, who stood with other people looking at stills which Frank Donnell was sorting on a table.

"Hello, ducky!" said Rosalind, extending one fair hand and drawing Annan to her side. "We're looking at Mr. Stoll's delightful stills. Isn't this one interesting?"—holding up the finished photograph. "How wonderfully Betsy screens! Look, Nan,"—turning to one of the girls behind her; and then, remembering, she introduced Annan to Nancy Cassell, a small, blond girl, as nervously organised as a butterfly.

"Your stories in the *Planet* have cost me many a tear, Mr. Annan," said Miss Cassell. "Why do you always exterminate your heroes and heroines?"

"Somebody's got to thin 'em out," he explained, "or they'd become a pest like the sparrow and the potato beetle—"

"If you don't save a pair for breeding they'll become extinct," retorted Nancy. "I'm going to join a hero-heroine protective association with a closed season for mating. . . .

Please join." Her eyes flickered provocation, curiosity, defiance. As usual he ignored the challenge.

Donnell, with his gentle but wearied smile, handed her a new photograph, and offered a second to Rosalind. Behind them, in the recess of the window, was another girl, and Donnell turned with kindly courtesy and handed her a still. As he moved aside to give her room at the table, Annan, also, politely made a place for her, noticing her supple grace as she moved forward in silhouette, the sun, behind her, outlining a curved cheek and slender neck.

And suddenly he knew her.

"Eris!" he exclaimed, delighted.

"I was afraid you didn't remember me, Mr. Annan——"

A slim hand, scarce ventured, lay in his,—lay very still and cool and unresponsive.

"Eris,—*Eris!*" he repeated with a boyish warmth so unfeigned that the bright colour slowly came into her face and her hand reacted nervously to his.

Rosalind gave them a lazy glance over her shoulder: "Ding-dong! Take your corners," she said, offering them a still in which Eris figured. And, to Eris: "I'll tell you something, my dear; if I screened like you I'd quit squalling top notes. . . . *Look* at her in this one, Barry! Isn't she *too* sweet? Isn't Eris wonderful, Frank?"—to Mr. Donnell, who smiled in his amiable, tired way and sorted out more photographs.

"Here, my dear," said Rosalind, offering another still to Eris, "I can stand a prettier girl than I am for just so long. But you and Barry may admire indefinitely if you like."

The lovely colour of embarrassment came into the girl's face as she took the photograph thrust upon her:

"Mr. Stoll gets the best out of one," she protested. "The rest is all in the make-up, Rosalind——"

"The rest is all in *you*," retorted Rosalind. "You're scaring us all stiff with your beauty. God help us to bear it."

Eris, holding her own picture, let her flushed glance stray toward Annan as he bent beside her.

"You're coming into your own, Eris," he said gaily. "I can see what you have done for yourself already."

"You can see what *you* have done for me," she replied under her breath.

"What?"

"You gave me my chance."

"Nonsense. Betsy did that. You are doing the rest for yourself. You're making good. That's evident. You're happy, too. . . . Are you?"

"Yes."

"Well, little pilgrim," he said smilingly, "I guess you really knew your business that night under the stars in the Park. And the credit is all yours——"

"It's *yours!*" she interrupted with a sudden passion in her voice that startled him.

"My dear child," he protested, but she went on breathlessly:

"I know what you've done if *you* don't! You made it all possible. This is what I craved; what I needed. It's *life* to me, Mr. Annan. And you gave it."

"I had absolutely nothing to——"

"You did! You had everything to do with it. From the time you spoke to me in the Park to the time I left a letter for you, I *lived* for the first time in my life. You don't understand. Kindness comes very easy to you—and—and out of your rich store you are—are generous with the treasures of your mind——"

Something choked her; she averted her head.

Surprised, yet half inclined to laugh, he waited a moment. Then:

"You are so delightfully grateful for nothing," he said. "I wish I really had done you a service."

She spoke, unsteadily, still looking away from him:

"You don't understand. . . . I can't trust myself now.

... I seem to be emotional——” She shook her head and he saw the bobbed hair glimmer red against the sunny window.

As they stood there in the curtained recess, Frank Donnell's voice rose above the general conversation:

“Isn't that operator nearly ready in the projection room?”

Mr. Zanger left the room to inquire.

Annan turned and accidentally encountered Mr. Smull's fixed smile.

Something in the persistent, sanguine gaze of the man annoyed him—as though Mr. Smull had had him under impertinent observation for some time without his knowledge. He turned to Eris:

“I wish you really were under obligations to me,” he said lightly, “—you assume imaginary ones so adorably. Shall we go and see how you and Betsy behave yourselves on the screen?”

She nodded with a swift intake of breath—let him draw her arm through his. They followed the little crowd now moving toward the review room.

Seated together there in the semi-darkness, they watched Frank Donnell and Max Stoll take their places at desks on a raised platform behind them. A stenographer, with pad and pencil, came in and seated herself at Donnell's elbow.

Out went the lights except the green-shaded globe on Donnell's desk. The screen sprang into silvery relief.

Donnell half turned, looking up over his shoulder toward the concealed operator above:

“All right, Jim. Don't speed her too much. About 85. And watch your frames.”

“Are you ready, Mr. Donnell?”

“Go ahead.”

No continuity was attempted. There were no titles, not even scratch ones. Take followed take, faded or irised out. Nobody unacquainted with the story could possibly follow it.

In the darkness and silence there was no sound except the droning of the machine, and Donnell's calm voice occasionally,—“Frame! *Frame* her, Jim!” And whispered exclamations of approval at some unusually beautiful shot of Stoll's, or at some fragment revealing Betsy, radiantly in action, or a butterfly flash of Nancy Cassell, or a lovely glimpse of Eris.

The door of the outer corridor kept opening and closing to admit professionals arriving late. The darkness was becoming thronged with people standing back against the door and walls.

Once, as Betsy was enduring a chaste embrace from Wally Crawford, the film broke. Everybody joined in the gaiety. Then the little audience re-settled itself with scrape of chair and rustle of skirt as Donnell's shaded globe glimmered out, revealing a crowded room.

Annan leaned over toward Betsy: “Good work,” he said cordially. “You're splendid. I hope the story is as clever.”

“Thank you, Barry. Frank thinks it ought to go over.”

“It's beautifully cast and beautifully kissed, Betsy!”

Coltfoot's voice from the dark: “—But the censor won't let you kiss anybody but your grandmother.”

“Great stuff, Betsy,” added Rosalind from somewhere. “God and the Middle West will forgive that kiss!”

“All set, Mr. Donnell,” came the operator's voice from above.

“Go ahead!” The light in the shaded globe snapped off; the drone of the machine filled the room. On the screen Eris, in a rowboat, rested on her oars and laughed at Betsy swimming toward her, pursued by her young man. His permanent wave defied the waves.

Annan thought: “Betsy is sure an artist or she'd never stand for the beauty of this child, Eris. . . . I wonder how long she *can* afford to stand for it?”

He bent close to the girl in the wicker chair beside him: “I couldn't know that you really had it in you, Eris; could I?” he whispered.

"Do you think I have?" she breathed.

He whispered: "I *know* it. You are a born actress, Eris. Your work is charming."

He felt her breath lightly on his cheek:

"It's all Frank Donnell: I wouldn't know what to do. He tells me and shows me. I try to comprehend. I do exactly what he tells me."

"If you weren't a born actress, even Frank Donnell couldn't do anything with you. It's *you*, Eris. You're intelligent; you're lovely to look at. I can't see why your future isn't in your own hands."

"I'm simply crazy to talk to you about it. Could I?" she whispered excitedly.

"Of course," he said, much flattered.

"I've wanted to for so long. There are so many things, Mr. Annan—and you could tell me why."

Still the same, wistful cry, "Will you tell me why?"—and he remembered it, now, guiltily, sorry for his long neglect.

"Are you still living in Jane Street, Eris?"

"Yes."

"Shall I come to see you?"

"I haven't a place to receive you."

"Only a bed-room? It wouldn't do, I suppose."

"They wouldn't let me. Mrs. Plummer is strict——"

"Quite right. . . . Do you mind dining with me some evening?"

"She hesitated: "Where?"

"Anywhere you choose. The Ritz?"

"I haven't—suitable clothes——"

"If you feel that way, will you dine with me at my house?"

"You're so kind, Mr. Annan. I'd love to! When may I——"

Their whispering was making somebody in front restless. Annan's slight pressure on her arm silenced her. He seemed to recollect that Mr. Smull sat directly in front of Eris; and, again, very vaguely he was conscious of irritation.

There was no use in attempting to guess at the story which the machine above was steadily unreeling. It all seemed an inconsequential jumble of repetitions, full of aggravating close-ups—which better taste, some day, will eliminate from the screen.

When he thought Mr. Smull was again quiescent, Annan placed his lips close to the unseen ear of the girl beside him:

“Come Thursday at seven. . . . Shall I ask anybody else?”

She shook her head. Then, turning impulsively to whisper to him, in the darkness her lips brushed his.

Instantly she recoiled, almost upsetting her chair, and he caught it and steadied her.

His inclination to laugh subsided. He could not see her face, but, in the chilled silence, he was conscious of her dismay and of her rigid body beside him.

The shock of contact confused him, too. A delicate perfume of chaste youth seemed to cling to him, invade him, disturbing his natural ease and fluency. For the first time in his life, perhaps, he found nothing flippant to say.

For a long while they remained mute, unstirring, as the endless reel droned on and on.

Finally,—and very careful not to touch her,—he ventured to whisper:

“Why not make it this evening—unless you are otherwise engaged?”

He could scarcely hear her reply: “Mr. Smull is giving a dinner for Betsy. I promised to go.”

“Who is giving the party?”

“Mr. Smull.”

Again he experienced a vague sense of irritation.

“I thought you had no dinner gown,” he said drily.

“Betsy offered me one of hers.”

After a silence he said cheerfully: “I hope you’ll have a gay evening, Eris. Call me up when you care to dine with me.”

They watched the screen for a while, not speaking. Presently, however, she whispered: "I wish I could, to-night. I'd rather be with you. I've waited so long. . . . And now—I can't! And I'm heartbroken, Mr. Annan."

He was beginning to realise that the candour of this girl held an unsuspected but unmistakable charm for him. He said under his breath:

"I'll drive you home when this is over. We can plan things then."

"I can't, Mr. Annan. Mr. Smull has offered to drive me home."

A disagreeable sensation—the same indefinite feeling—dismissed with a slight shrug;—and suddenly, subtly, this girl's position and his own slipped into the reverse. Now it was *he* who seemed to have waited so long for a chance to talk to her,—he who was becoming impatient.

"Can you give me to-morrow evening, Eris?"

"Oh, I'm sorry! There is another party. I promised Betsy to go with her."

"Is Mr. Smull perpetually giving parties?" he demanded.

"It's somebody else. I don't remember who. Mr. Smull is taking Betsy and me."

"Have you any time at all to give me this week?" he inquired, the slightest hint of sarcasm in his pretended amusement.

"Yes. Thursday. May I come?"

"I am flattered speechless."

He rather felt than saw her turn toward him in her chair, then subside in silence.

He leaned over, closer:

"I *want* you; I didn't realise how much I wished to talk to you," he said. "I want you to come and dine at the house, Eris, and tell me everything you care to. Will you?"

After a while, slowly: "I need to . . . if you'll let me. . . . You don't seem to understand how much you mean

to me. I never before talked to a man like you. I've been wild to see you again——”

“What!”

“You know it!” she said passionately. “You fascinate me! If you'll only talk to me, sometimes, I can learn something!”

“I'll talk to you until you find out what a fraud I am,” he whispered, still laughing. “On your own bobbed head be it! I'm not proof against such charming flattery as yours. Is it to be Thursday, then?”

“Please!—And thank you so much——”

“Do you *promise*, Eris?”

“I? Oh, you know I do. You are laughing at me, Mr. Annan——”

“I'm very serious. I want you to promise to come—whether Mr. Smull gives a party or not——”

“You *are* laughing at me!”

“You listen to me! I'm never going to let you go again,” he said with an ardour for which, later, he was unable to account. “This is the beginning of a friendship. And that's a serious business, Eris.”

“Yes,” she whispered solemnly, “it is. How can I ever thank you? I've dreamed of it often; but I didn't dare hope for it. . . . Do you *really* feel as I do, Mr. Annan?”

He had come to a point where he was not quite sure of what he did feel. The increasing charm of her was confusing and upsetting him,—he having suddenly to do with a kind of emotion to which he was naturally averse. No woman had ever touched him, sentimentally . . . so far. . . . What Eris was doing to him he did not comprehend.

In a sort of instinctive bravado he leaned toward her and laid his hand firmly over hers.

“You're very generous,” he said. “I could have gone to see you and I didn't. That wasn't friendly of me. Your loyalty makes me ashamed. If you'll give me another chance to be of practical use——”

Her nervous fingers pressed his in protest : "No—not that! I thought I made it clear——"

"I didn't mean—money——"

"I'll never accept it," she whispered fiercely. "I only want *you!* Don't you know that I've been starved all my life and that you are the first person who ever satisfied me! Can't you understand what such a man means to me?"

Her amazing intellectual passion for him swept him clean off his feet :

"I'll never let you go again, never!" he whispered, not very clear as to what he meant.

She clung to his hand in pledge of the pact, every intellectual aspiration excited, thrilled to the spirit by sheerest delight.

As for him, emotions unsuspected and inextricably confused set his youthful brain spinning.

Disbelief, reluctance, fastidiousness, pride, perhaps, and constant mental preoccupation had steered this young man clear of lesser emotions. His few love affairs had been born of a mischievous curiosity. No woman had ever really stirred him,—not even intellectually. Women were agreeable to go about with, amusing to analyse; characters to build on, to create. That was the real rôle they had played in his career.

And now, for the first time in his life, emotional impulse had upset his complacent equilibrium, and had incited him to say and do things, the import of which was not very clear to him.

And he hadn't yet come to his senses sufficiently to analyse the situation and discover what it was all about.

In the darkness, beside her, the charm of her seemed to envelop him progressively—steal stealthily through and through him, stimulating his imagination, exciting his curiosity and a swiftly increasing desire to learn more about her.

The honesty of her admiration for him flattered him as he never before had been flattered. Such naïve, such ardent

adoration quite upset his mental balance, and slightly intoxicated him.

Nothing ever had so appealed, so moved this sophisticated young man. And, add the girl's beauty, and nascent talent to that, the total was too much for him—might have been too much for older and more level heads than Barry Annan's.

"Thursday," he whispered, as she slowly released her hand from his—freed it with a sort of winning reluctance.

"Yes," she breathed, "at seven."

"And many, many other hours together," he added fervently.

"Oh, I hope so. . . . Thank you, Mr. Annan."

Sitting in silence there he had a confused idea that never had he encountered a feminine mind so utterly purged of material sentiment.

"It behooves me to keep my own brain as clear," he thought, vaguely,—seeming to realise that it was no longer entirely so.

Suddenly the drone of the machine ceased; the lights went on; the screen faded.

All around him people stirred, rose, turned to exchange impressions, congratulations.

The light sobered Annan. He turned almost apprehensively to look at Eris.

Something radical happened to him as he met her grey eyes,—crystal-clear eyes, beautiful, unabashed.

"Good-bye," he said in a voice that sounded odd in his own ears.

Once more he took her hand, and the contact stirred him to definite emotion. Had she been experienced she could have seen much to astonish and trouble her girl's soul in this young man's face.

"Good-bye," she said with adorable frankness, "—and thank you—always—Mr. Annan."

As he went away toward the corridor where Coltfoot stood

talking to Rosalind, he began to realise that something had happened to him.

Rosalind, seeing him, crinkled her eyes and wrinkled her fascinating nose:

"Did you turn her head, Barry? Is that child to follow Betsy and myself? Everybody noticed you."

He said, annoyed: "She wouldn't consider that very humorous."

Rosalind's dark eyes widened lazily: "Did you suppose I meant it, Barry? You're rather crude for a subtle novelist, aren't you?"

"She wouldn't understand it," he repeated, annoyed. "She's an unusually sensitive girl."

He went on along the corridor to take leave of Frank Donnell.

Rosalind looked at Coltfoot, inclined to giggle.

"Don't think it," said Coltfoot with a shrug.

"I don't know—" Rosalind turned and looked across at Eris. Smull had seated himself beside her in Annan's chair. Other men gathered around her. Her beauty startled Rosalind.

"It would be funny," she said. "That child has no heart. Neither has Barry Annan. . . . They're merely a pair of minds. . . . It would be funny if they became entangled . . . intellectually."

CHAPTER XIV

THEY didn't dine together at Annan's house in Governor's Place; or anywhere else.

Eris tried desperately to get him on the telephone. A few minutes before train time she telegraphed:

"Am leaving unexpectedly at three o'clock this afternoon for the Pacific Coast. Heart-broken on account of our engagement. Shall write from train.

"Eris."

When Annan returned about six to order dinner and flowers, and to dress for the rôle of host, he found her telegram.

Whatever is snatched away from man or beast instantly becomes disproportionately desirable.

It was so with Annan. Suddenly he realised how much he wanted Eris. Really he had not thought much about this dinner, except immediately after their meeting at the *Looking Glass*.

He had borne it in mind, impatiently the first day, pleasantly the second, with complacent equanimity thereafter. But he *had* remembered it.

For the moments of surprise and emotion so charmingly experienced in the projection room had little else except surprise for a foundation. Curiosity alone perpetuated them.

To a young man agreeably immersed in his own affairs such episodes became incidents very quickly. Only an unexpected obstacle evokes afresh circumstances and emotions which have become vague.

Her telegram did this. Disappointment, retrospection, regret, annoyance, sentimental impatience,—these in sequence possessed the young man as he sat holding her telegram. The only mitigation seemed to be in her statement concerning her broken heart. That flattered and helped.

He was in no mood to dine out, but he didn't want to dine at home alone. The conflict continued, full of sentimental indecision.

It ended by his ringing for Mrs. Sniffen, ordering a cold bite on a tray, stripping to undershirt, chamber-robe, and slippers, and plunging into his novel, now well under way.

About eleven next morning, in similar attire, and with an electric fan whizzing in the room, he interrupted work long enough to open the envelope which Mrs. Sniffen brought him and which bore a special delivery stamp:

“Dear Mr. Annan:

“I tried to get you on the telephone up to the last moment. The disappointment seemed too much for me after I had waited so long. I could have wept. I didn't; I don't weep easily. But the vision of the evening we might have had haunts me every moment.

“This is what happened. The directors who finance the Betsy Blythe Films suddenly decided to send us to the Coast for the new pictures. The reasons, I believe, are economical.

“Can you imagine the company's consternation? We had no time to prepare ourselves. If Mr. Smull and Betsy hadn't stopped and taken me in Mr. Smull's car I couldn't have caught the train.

“My only consolation is that the play seems to be a good one and they have given me a part—a darling part if I do it decently. I was to have had only a maid's part but Miss Cassell refused to go to the Coast and there wasn't time to recast the part.

“Even then I don't think they'd have given it to me if

Mr. Smull hadn't said that he'd like me to have it. I pray humbly that I may be equal to it. Never has anything so excited me as this chance.

"But if only I could have known it, and spent every second talking it over with you! I don't mean that Mr. Donnell is not my hope and salvation; but you are *you*, Mr. Annan, and there is no other man's mind that stimulates and entralls mine as yours does.

"Please don't forget me. Please write to me. I know it is a very great deal to ask of such a man. But you *are* kind, and you are famous; and I am ignorant and a nobody. Whatever you say helps. Just your voice, even your smile, acts on me like intellectual tonics—that lazy, wise, kindly, perplexing smile, so mischievously experienced, that encourages yet warns! I *wanted* it so desperately. I needed it—and you—just when I felt that my career was beginning. Oh, Mr. Annan, please understand and please, please don't forget me."

"Eris."

In a postscript she gave her address in Los Angeles.

Much flattered and genuinely touched, he wrote her immediately.

The glamour lasted for the next few weeks. Complacency is a great stimulation to memory. A bland satisfaction in the ardent mental attitude of Eris toward himself incited him to real effort in his letters. He became expansive—a trifle sentimental when he thought of the girl's beauty—but only airily so—and he rather settled down to a Chesterfieldian attitude toward his unusual and odd little protégée.

Wisdom in wads he administered with a surprising solemnity foreign to his accustomed attitude toward himself.

However, his flippancy *was* an attitude as far as it concerned his belief in himself. Because this young man really took himself very devoutly.

He prescribed a course of reading for Eris. He formulated rules of conduct, exposed pitfalls, impressed maxims in epigrams, discoursed on creative and interpretive art. It was perversely clever. He used some of the material in his novel.

This was all very well. The girl's letters were charming and touching; the correspondence was excellent practice for him, and part of it could be salvaged for practical ends.

But there were in use at that time, among the semi-educated, two cant-words which the public, now, was working to rags;—*psychology* and *complex*.

And it was these words that suggested to Annan that his letters to Eris might, more profitably to himself, become experiments in research and vivisection.

Toward that angle,—and with all the delicacy and technical skill possessed by him,—he started a cautious exploration of her character as a “type,” including that untouched and undiscovered side which comprehended the impulses, material motives, emotional passions, popularly attributed to the human heart in contradistinction to phenomena purely intellectual.

Several letters came from her without any notice being taken of his investigations. Apparently she either possessed no such side to her character or else she did not understand him. Anyway, there was no response, and therefore no revelation of herself to satisfy his professional curiosity.

One thing seemed to become clearer and clearer; *he* had not appealed to this girl except intellectually. Of lesser sentiment in her there was not a hint or a trace in all her correspondence—only ardent gratitude for material kindness and passionate response to a generous mind that had offered itself to a starved one.

He had concluded that his subtle and mischievous epistolary philandering was not destined to reveal any dormant inclinations to response in Eris—much less any natural aptitude or acquired skill.

And he was debating in his leisure moments whether or not such total unconsciousness was normal or otherwise, when out of a serene sky came a letter from her in reply to his last and cleverest experiment in reactions:

“Dear Mr. Annan:

“Until rather lately it never occurred to me to analyse my feeling of friendship for you.

“I don’t know exactly how to. I have tried. It confuses me.

“I like *everything* you say. I didn’t realise I was silent concerning any phase of our friendship. But I had not thought of your having any liking for me outside of your natural kindness to me. Or that I had any personal charm for you; or that you might like to be with me even if we do not say a word to each other.

“That idea of companionship had not entered my head. But now that you have spoken of it—or your letters, lately, have seemed to suggest it—I am venturing to reply that, just being with you is a pleasure to me . . . just to walk with you and remain mentally idle, I mean.. I realised it only when you spoke of it.

“Friendship seems to be very complex. You must remember that this is my first intelligent friendship. It quite overshadows all other associations. So I really do not know just where my feeling for you could fail to include all the best that is in me.

“I’d like to talk to you about it. If only you were here! Do you know that if it were not for your letters I’d be unhappy here, in spite of my beloved profession?

“Is this what you would like to have me say to you?

“You drew a picture of yourself as a brain on two legs; and of me in academic cap and gown, with a silly expression on my face, clasping both hands in ecstasy before you. Out of your brain comes a balloon with something written in Latin—’Animus est in patinis.’

"I asked Mr. Donnell. He said it meant, 'My mind is among the sauce-pans.' In other words, you mean that your mind sometimes harbours material thoughts, while mine is the stupid, empty mind of a horrid, unhuman, intellectual sponge!"

"That is very impudent of you. Good heavens, if I *am* like that, it will ruin me for my profession!"

"Experience is what I lack. I sit and actually beat my head with both hands when, at moments, I catch a glimmer of all that I ought to be and ought to have experienced, and ought to know."

"Education is everything! One's career depends on it. Yet, is experience necessary to education? It can not always be. The prospect would seem terrifying. And of course any such theory becomes ridiculous in the last analysis."

"We were discussing that question the other evening—Mr. Donnell, Betsy, Mr. Smull—he arrived unexpectedly last Monday—and I was listening, not taking part in the discussion—when Mr. Smull said that nobody was fit to play a person in love unless he or she had actually been in love."

"You know that startled me. After a while it scared me, too."

"I asked Mr. Donnell, privately, if that were true, and he laughed and said that several perfectly respectable women, guiltless of murder, had successfully played Lady Macbeth."

"But I'm still wondering. Of course it isn't necessary to murder somebody in order to play the part of an assassin."

"But murder is an overt act. A murderous state of mind need not have any concrete consequence."

"Love, also, must be a state of mind."

"So do you think that one must have been actually in love to interpret convincingly in a play whatever results of love are to be presented?"

"I asked Betsy. She said yes. So I suppose she has been in love, because she does her part convincingly."

"But what about me if ever I am cast for such a part?"

Yet, it seems to me that I ought to have enough instinct and intelligence to know how to be convincing.

"You see Mr. Smull wants me to play second to Betsy in the next production; and the part is a girl in love who has a most unhappy time until the very end of the play.

"One can study, read up, and prepare; but one can not enter into *that* state of mind at will.

"So, if they give me the part I have concluded to approximate by thinking of my friendship for you, which is the most important event in my life.

"It ought to represent the state of mind in question. It's got to. Do you think I could play that part convincingly? Why not? Because my idea of a person in love is that there is only one object of supreme affection. And I don't care for anybody as much as I do for you. Why can't I build on that?—"

Charmed, humiliated, thrilled by her candour, the humour of her appeal went straight home to Annan.

For here was this girl innocently proposing to analyse and use her friendship for him to aid her in her profession;—the very thing that he had been doing so cynically.

Every word she wrote was helping him, professionally. Every line he had written in reply was evidently a source of professional inspiration to her.

It was not flattering to him, but it was funny. And, somehow, it knocked sentiment out of his letters: knocked out the letters, too, toward the end of the year.

The anesthetic of old Doctor Time is certain and irresistible. Sooner or later constancy fades, memory evaporates, humanity succumbs. Only the dog resists the anesthetic of old Doctor Time.

By February Annan had been in arrears for two months; and the effort to re-open the correspondence bored him.

Pigeon-holed, the memory of her would keep sufficiently fresh until such time—if ever—she was resurrected in the

flesh and came again into the trail he travelled through life.

He heard of her occasionally when he encountered Rosalind, who corresponded with Betsy.

Eris was being favourably discussed on the Coast.

In March a Betsy Blythe film was shown at *The Looking Glass*,—following that first film, parts of which he had seen the previous autumn in the projection room.

Once or twice he attempted to see the new picture—rather as a sort of obligation—but the place was crowded. Somehow time passed very swiftly for Annan; and when again he thought about it the picture was gone; and a new Betsy Blythe picture had replaced it,—playing to a crowded house as before;—and Annan went once, failed to get in, and let it slip his memory.

Not that his conscience did not meddle with his complacency at times. It did.

Her last three letters still remained unanswered.

But his novel was the vital, supreme thing which crowded out all else—even the several pretty and receptive girls whose stellar orbits had intersected his during the winter and early spring.

The joy of literary achievement was his chieftest pleasure; its perils his excitement, its fatigue the principal sleep-inducer that sent him at last to a tardy pillow.

Coltfoot read a typed copy.

“It’ll be the making of you, I suppose,” he said, “but it’s all wrong, Barry. Popular and punk!”

“Why the devil do you say that?”

“It *is* wrong.”

They were dining at Annan’s *à deux*, and had strolled into the living room with their cigars.

“You sit down, Mike, and tell me why my book is popular and punk!” said Annan wrathfully.

Coltfoot dropped onto the piano stool, sounded a few dissonances evolved by a master-modernist; sneered.

"Barry," he said, "if art isn't wholesome it's only near-art. What is good is also healthy. If art is good it is sane, always; and always beautiful."

"I've heard that song you sing. It's an ancient rag, Mike."

"It's real music, Barry—not *this!*—" he struck a series of dissonant, ugly, half-crazed chords from the most modern creation of the most modern of modernists. "That's diseased," he said. "There is no virtue, no beauty, no art in disease."

"Of course," remarked Annan, "I might mention ambergris, paté-de-fois-gras, the virtues of ergot, the play of colour, and the flower-like perfume of a dying grayling, and the——"

"If you're going to be flippant——"

"No. Go on, Mike."

"Barry, do you understand the origin of this modern 'revolt'—this sinister cult of dullness, perversity, ugliness? It was born in Bolshevism. Which is degeneracy. It is the worship of ugliness. It is known to scientists as Satanism.

"Once the prisons and asylums were the ultimate destinations of the degenerate. Because degenerates, then, had no safe outlet in the fine arts. Their manifestations were matters for police control.

"Now, they have their outlets in literature, drama, music, sculpture, painting. And their vicious or crazy creations profoundly impress The Great American Ass. Why? Because he's ignorant, and art awes him. But he's also, physically, a healthy beast, and he doesn't understand the degeneracy that masquerades as art.

"What is ugly, morbid, dull, rotten, cynical, pessimistic, is degenerate. To dwell upon disease in creative work is degeneracy. To seek out, analyse, celebrate, perpetuate ugliness, deformity, decay, is degeneracy.

"Yet, that is modernism. That is the trend. That is what is being done. That is what the new generation of creative genius offers,—and what it calls realism,—a dreary multi-

plicity of photographic items; a sordid recapitulation of daily and meaningless details; inspiration from models of distorted minds and bodies; ugliness lovingly delved for and dragged out into clean sunshine; triumphant exposure of the mentally, morally, and physically crippled.

“But there is the worse phenomenon—the degenerate writer, painter, sculptor, who sees ugliness in beauty, decay in health, atrophy in the normal,—and who caricatures the healthy and beautiful living model to evolve the ugly and obscene spectres that haunt his brain.

“Such are the so-called modernists. Their outer limit inside the bounds of sanity are Manet and Degas.

“Beyond that is the bedlam of Cezanne and Gauguin——”

“Say, old chap——”

“I *am* saying it. It’s the same old crisis—Rome or the Barbarians; Europe or Attila; the Prussians or Civilization.

“I tell you these half-crazed brains are beating at the gates of the world’s sanity to overthrow Reason from her very seat!

“Any alienist can tell you what the cult of ugliness means —what the morbid desire to mutilate means. What does it matter whether the living human body be the victim, or the attack be made upon figments of the imagination—whether upon the established order of harmony in music, or upon the pure standard of Greek sculpture, or upon the immortal beauty and symmetry in the pictures of the Great Masters !

“The point is this: the desire to mutilate is there; the murderous mania has discovered a safe outlet with pen, brush, chisel for weapons instead of pistol and butcher knife.

“The modernist is no longer a Ripper, except by intention. His degenerate fury wreaks itself on Art.

“Go to a Modernist Exhibition. Once the walls of an asylum would have been decorated with these drawings. Read modernist literature. Scrawled in prison bath-rooms would **have** been these lines in saner days. Listen to the

music of your modernist. Only Bedlam could have produced and enjoyed it, once.

"But to-day all crack-brains are being drawn together under the Bolshevik impulse to swarm, mutilate what is beautiful, destroy what lies within the eternal laws, annihilate all order, all that has withstood the test of civilisation.

"The Great American Ass hears the pandemonium and looks over the walls at the crazed herd of his demented fellows milling around the citadel.

"He looks at them and wags his ears, interested, perplexed. They'll tear him to pieces if they get in——"

"Good God!" burst out Annan, "—what has this to do with my novel——"

"It's tainted. It's infected with the cult of ugliness. So were your short stories in the *Planet* that gave you a name! You're stained with modernism."

"Damn it, I'm personally decent——"

"Some of the lunatics are, too. But the hullabaloo they're making is bound to affer—and infect—impressionable minds. All healthy and creative minds are impressionable. Yours is. This satanic cult of ugliness has influenced your mind to more sombre, more incredulous, less wholesome creations.

"All genius is imitative in some degree. You don't escape, Barry. The body-vermin of literature—the so-called modern critics—all are applauding you and tempting you to perpetuate more of that sinister ugliness which deformed your first work.

"Don't do it. Remember the real standards. They never change; only fashion changes. Stick to the clean master-jobs of the real giants in your profession. Those are the standards. Life is splendid. Man is fine. The beauty of both are best worth recording in art. Leave degeneracy to medicine. Leave modernism to the asylum. Make the cleavage definite between art and science. Find your themes in goodness, in beauty, in the nobility of the human mind——"

"Good heavens, Mike, are you one of those moral fanatics who evoke blue-laws even for literature?"

Coltfoot slowly shook his head: "Barry, you won't win out until you change your attitude toward the God who made you without a blemish. I'm telling you. The lunatic can't last. The dirty, greedy, commercial Jew or Christian art dealer or publisher who exploits Satanism, Bolshevism, insanity, for the sake of dirty dollars,—he has his thirty pieces of silver. And that's all. . . . I took mine—and published your stories. I'm through. I'm a he-Magdalen. I'm off that stuff."

"What do you mean?"

"I've chucked the *Planet*," said Coltfoot carelessly.

CHAPTER XV

ANNAN'S dreary, unpleasant and brilliantly ugly novel was published in April. There were three printings in the first week. Five in the second. In contradistinction to "small-town stuff," it was "big-town stuff." New York of the middle-lower class. And it *was* New York. Stenograph and photograph could verify every word uttered and every portrait. The accuracy of its penny-gossip was amazing. It was the apotheosis in epigram of the obvious.

The determined ignoring of all beauty; the almost fanatical blindness to everything except what is miserable, piddling, sordid, and deformed in humanity; the pathetic loyalty to the sort of "truth" which has a place in economic statistics if not in creative art—the drab, hopeless, ignoble atmosphere where swill was real enough to smell and where all delicacy and functional privacy was sternly disregarded, caused a literary uproar in the reading belt, and raucous applause among all Realists.

There are good Christians and good Jews, both admirable and loyal citizens of the Republic, good scholars, good soldiers, good men.

There are intellectual Bolsheviks among Christians—degenerate fanatics, perverted Puritans; and among Jews are their equivalents.

The bawling Christian literary critic who assaults with Bolshevik violence all literature except his own is a privileged blackmailer and commits legal libel.

His Jewish confrère is no more vulgar. Both are only partly educated. They live parasitically upon the body of literature. They are cooties.

The **several** more notorious ones welcomed Annan. They liked what he wrote because it was what they would have written if they could. Later, if he didn't continue to write what they liked, they'd bite him. They had no other means of retaliation.

One, named Minkwitz, who made a good living by biting harder and with less discrimination than the usual literary cootie, wrote a violent article in praise of raw realism, and crowned Annan with it.

A female pervert on a Providence, Rhode Island, periodical discovered that there was a "delicate stench" about Annan's realism which she found "rather stimulating than otherwise."

The joylessness of the novel appealed to the bluenose. He read it and ordered his family to read it. They'd better learn as much as possible about the "worm that never dies."

All crack-brains read it and approved.

Then the Great American Ass read it. All Iowa borrowed it from circulating libraries. Oklahoma read it. And finally Nebraska placed upon it the official chaplet of literary success.

Finally everybody read it—everybody from uplifter to shoplifter.

And it became a best-seller in rivalry with the exudations of the favourite female writer of the Centre of Population—a noisy and bad-tempered woman whose only merit was that she unwittingly furnished scientific minds with material for healthy laughter.

Thus the first novel of Barry Annan, purposely un-serialised as a *ballon d'essai*, ascended to the skies like the fat, bourgeois and severed soul of Louis XVI, amid a roll of revolutionary drums.

The unusual aspect of the case was that, technically, the book was nearly perfect; the style admirable and with scarce a flaw. Now the Great American Ass understands nothing of literary workmanship. Style means nothing to him. Yet he bolted Annan's book and seemed to enjoy the flavour.

Seemed to. For one never can know anything **definite** about an ass.

From the Pacific coast Betsy Blythe wrote Annan. She had read the novel. That, ostensibly, was her theme. She applauded his fame, expressed herself as proud to be numbered among the friends of such a celebrity.

Then there was some gossip about herself, the company,—inquiry as to how he had liked the pictures which she assumed he had seen in the East.

Then there was a paragraph: "What are *you* doing to our Eris, Barry? I suppose it's what you did to me, to Rosalind, to every fresh and attractive face which possessed ears to listen to your golden vocabulary. Still, I don't see how you had time: you saw her only that one afternoon in the projection room, she tells me.

"But I suppose you're as deadly by letter as otherwise. Like measles I suppose we all have got to have *you*. Eris had it harder, that's all.

"But I'm going to tell you that when she recovers,—as we all do,—you'll be surprised at the charming creature she is turning into.

"I honestly think she is the most intelligent girl I ever knew. She not only *looks* but she sees. She learns like lightning. The odd thing about her is the decided quality in her. Her mind is the mind of a gentlewoman. As for the externals—trick of voice and speech and bearing, it scarcely seems as though she acquired them. Rather they seem to have been latent in her, and have merely developed.

"Yet she tells me she is the daughter of very plain people.

"Well, Eris, in her way, is already a celebrity on the Coast. She has become quite the loveliest to look at out here. And she is a natural actress. There, my friend! Am I generous?

"Alas, Barry, she worries me. I like her, admire her, but—it seems ignoble in me—I can't stand the competition.

We can't go on together. She's too pretty and too clever. It seems impossible to bury her under any part, no matter how rotten.

"There'll come a time when the Betsy Blythe Films will mean only Eris.

"If she's going to become as good as that she ought to have her own company. She couldn't stand such competition; nobody could; and I'm not going to.

"I don't want to bury her; but if we go on playing together she'll bury me. It's right that we should part, professionally. It's only fair to both of us.

"That darned Albert Smull is responsible. He's been out here three times. When it comes to casting the company, outside of myself, what he wants is done. And he's mad about Eris.

"The last time he came out here, his partner, Leopold Shill, came with him. Between them they do two-thirds of our financing. Well, while they were, as always, perfectly friendly to me, their interest was in Eris. How the devil am I to make it plain to them that Eris and I ought not to be in the same company?

"I *could* explain it to her and she'd understand. But Albert Smull and Leo Shill would misunderstand, utterly, and put me down as a jealous cat.

"So 'that's that,' as Eris has it when she's made up her mind. I've made up mine. I've got to kiss her good-bye. But when I do I'll kiss a future star. I'll say so. You tell 'em.

"Good-bye, you philandering but lovable egoist. I like your rotten novel—not spontaneously—but because if one only could like that sort of sob-stuff it's the stuffiest, sobbyest story I ever snivelled over.

"BETSY."

"P. S.—Your dowdy, disagreeable aunt, Mrs. Magnelius Grandcourt, is in Pasadena for her health—maybe her temper, too—and she was nasty to me because I'm in pictures.

"Of course I don't mind: nobody pays any attention to those old dames who ruled New York a decade ago. All that ended with the war. She knows darned well where I belong.

"But the funny part of it is that she's taken a majestic shine to Eris. She's stopping with the Pelham-Cliffords at their handsome place near Pasadena, and the Pelham-Cliffords are live ones and they let us shoot some scenes on their place.

"That was how your aunt had an opportunity to be nasty to me. But exactly why she condescended to patronise Eris, I don't know.

"She continually asks the P-Cliffords to ask Eris over. Eris goes occasionally. I asked her point-blank why that peevish old party was so amiable to her, and she blushed in that engagingly confused way and said that your aunt knew her great grandmother.

"Apparently there *was* quality in the forebears of Eris, or that dumpy old snob wouldn't have made any fuss over the great grandchild of somebody who died years and years ago."

CHAPTER XVI

ANNAN was in a way of being rather pleased with himself. Nobody can remain entirely unshaken by the impact of the sort of flattery hurled in hunks by the Great American Ass.

For with him it is all or nothing, repletion or starvation.

Also, unlike his French and British brothers, he is a disloyal ass. Also a capricious one. There is no respect in him for past performance once lauded. The established favourite grown old in service sooner or later becomes a target for his heels.

This is not heartlessness; it is ignorance of what has been done for him and of those who have done it.

For he really is the most sentimental of asses. Sentiment and temper are the two outlets for the uneducated. They are his. Convince the Great American Ass that his behaviour is callous, capricious, cruel, and he'd asphyxiate his victim in sentimental saliva.

For this secretion foams up from the Centre of Population and oozes in all directions. It is the solvent for the repulsive, the ugly, the sordid, offered in the pill of Art by Modernism.

But what, exactly, this pill is going to do to the Great American Ass is still a social and pathological problem.

Annan was up to his neck in saliva. That great army of slight acquaintances with which the average man is afflicted became old friends over night.

Annan was running the whole gamut from these, and from readers utterly unknown to him. Every mail brought

requests for loans, autographs, and for personal assistance of various sorts; and there were endless charitable appeals, offers to lecture, offers of election to clubs, guilds, associations, societies he never heard of; requests for his patronage, his endorsement of saleable articles; requests for criticism upon the myriad efforts of unsuccessful writers; demands that he should "place" their effusions; personal calls from agents, publishers, cranks.

And there was, of course, a great influx of silliness—flirtatious letters, passionate love letters, sentimental requests for signed photographs. And among these, as always, were offensive letters, repulsive letters, sinister and usually anonymous. The entire gamut.

Toward him there was a new and flattering attitude, even in old friends, and no matter how honest and sincere, even in those who disapproved his work, this unconscious attitude toward a publicly successful man was noticeable.

Otherwise, in public, his face and name were becoming sufficiently well known to attract curiosity.

In shops clerks would smirk and inquire, "Mr. Annan, the novelist?" Proprietors and underlings in his accustomed haunts were likely to point him out to other customers. He was becoming accustomed to being stared at.

Now, some of these phenomena are anything but agreeable to the newly successful; but, *en masse*, these manifestations are not calculated to inculcate steadiness and modesty in anybody.

A thousand times Annan had told himself that no success could ever unbalance him a fraction of one degree. But success is an insidious fever. One walks with it without suspecting the infection. Without knowing that three-quarters of the people who shake one's hand are carriers of this same and subtle fever.

However, Barry Annan appeared to thrive. All was well with him. All was going "according to plan."

His newest novel, scarcely begun, promised dazzlingly.

He was eager, always, to get at it. That was a most excellent sign. He even preferred writing it to doing anything else. Another good sign.

Otherwise all was well with him, and going well.

His love affairs, always verbal ones, distracted him agreeably and were useful professionally. Easily, as always, he slipped out of one into another with no discomfort to himself and only a brief but deeper pang for the girl.

Few of these mildly amourous episodes resulted in anything except a rather more agreeable and carefree friendship,—as in the cases of Betsy Blythe and Rosalind Shore. Disillusioned they liked him better but in a different way.

Probably Eris would, too, when she returned from the Coast,—if ever she did return.

Thus, without effort, he reassured himself concerning her three unanswered letters. His was the gayest and most optimistic of consciences,—a little gem of altruism. Per se it functioned beautifully. He never meddled. It ran like a watch ticking cheerily.

But it never had had anything serious to deal with. How heavy a weight it might sustain there was no knowing.

In light marching order his conscience had guided him very nicely, so far. How would it steer him when it carried weight?

It was early in June that he encountered Coltfoot by chance. They had not met in months.

Coltfoot did not look shabby nor even wilted, but he wore last year's summer clothes and straw hat, and his dark, rather grim features seemed thinner.

Annan insisted that they lunch together at the Province Club. They did. Their respective reports revealed their situations since they last had met; Annan had only success to recapitulate,—Coltfoot a cordial and sincerely happy listener.

But it had gone otherwise with Coltfoot. When he re-

signed from the *Planet* because his self-respect couldn't tolerate its policy, the business situation was not such as to make job hunting easy.

"Outside of any salary I've income enough to live on rather rottenly," he remarked, "but I don't want to."

"You mean you haven't a job, Mike?"

"Oh, I've got one—one of those stinking magazines which can be bought any day and which always are being 'revived' by 'new blood.'

"I'm supposed to be that fresh and sanguinary reservoir. We may file a petition in bankruptcy or continue. There's no telling."

"What an outrage! A man of your calibre——"

"Don't worry. Somewhere in dusty perspective the job I'm destined to nab is lumbering along the highway of life. I'll hold it up when it tries to pass 'by me."

"You know, Mike, that if ever you're short——"

"Thanks. . . . No fear. What sort of fodder do you next hand out to your famishing public?"

"I'm preparing it. . . . You won't like it, Mike."

"Same graft?"

"What do you mean, graft——"

"You poor fish, are you touchy already?"

Annan reddened very slightly, then laughed:

"Kick my pants hard if ever I'm *that*, Mike. May the Lord defend me from solemnity and smugness! . . . Mike, I wish we could see more of each other. . . . Things worry me a lot sometimes. A fellow has got to believe in himself, yet complacency is destruction. . . . All this—you know what I mean—disconcerts a man. . . . I admit it. It's come to a point where actually I don't know whether my stuff is worth immortality, or a tinker's dam, or zero.

"Yet I feel I *can* deliver the hootch."

"It's hootch all right."

"Well—God knows. . . . Like the Mad Hatter—or was it the Rabbit?—I've used the best ingredient."

"There were crumbs in it," said Coltfoot. "Besides, wood-alcohol isn't a lubricant."

Thus from simile to allegory, to inference via insinuation—discourse in terms possible only between old friends of different species born in the same culture among fellow bacilli of their period.

"Hang it all," insisted Annan, "the world isn't swimming in syrup!"

"Nor in vinegar, Barry."

"I can't see the sugar-candy aspect of a story," said Annan. "All that lovey-lovey-sweetie-sweetie goo is as dead as Cleopatra."

"There *was* a Cleopatra. And she loved. There *was* beauty, brilliancy, ardour, wit, gaiety, pleasure—"

"—*And the asp!*"

"Yes, but why star the asp? It bit only once. Why devote the whole story to ominous apprehension, the relentless approach of horror from beyond vast horizons? There were long intervals of sunlight and song in Cleopatra's day. Why make of your book a monograph on poisons? Why turn it into a history of the asp? Why minutely construct a treatise on serpents?

"Good Lord, Barry, when you've a good dinner served you at home, why slink to the nearest ash-can and rummage for putrid bones?"

"After all, there *are* a few million garbage cans in the world."

"Their contents are not nourishing. Why not leave such scraps to the degenerates so well known to the medical gentlemen who specialize in them?—to the Gauguins, Cezannes, Matisses among professors and students in that ghastly clinic where subject, operator and onlooker are scarcely distinguishable to the normal eye?"

"Good heavens, what bitterness!"

"Good God, what insanity!"

"I must hew out my own way—" insisted Annan hotly.

"Hew on! But follow the standard! Don't lose sight of the standard——"

"Standards change——"

"Not The Cross!"

There was a silence; then Barry said: "Is it the function of art to make people better by lying to them?"

"It is not its function to make them worse by offering distorted truths."

"Does it hurt people to know the truer and less pleasant side of life?"

"No; but it hurts them to dwell on it. That's what modernism makes them do."

"Life is nine-tenths unpleasant."

"Then say so in a line. And in the rest of your story try to help people to endure those nine-tenths by forgetting them while they read about the other tenth."

"I'm not going to mutilate truth," retorted Annan.

"You *do* mutilate it. The school that influences you mutilates truth as was mutilated the body of Osiris! The school that stains you with its shadow is a school of mutilators. I'm not squeamish, Barry. I'm for plain writing. The truths leered at or slurred over or ignored by convention can be decently presented in proportion to their importance in any story.

"But satyrism in art, the satanism that worships ugliness, the perversion that twists, distorts, mutilates the human body, the human mind, nature, the only flawless masterpiece, —no, I'm not for these. I tell you that the entire modernist movement is but a celebration of The Black Mass. Crazy and sane, *that* is what the leaders in this school are doing. Their god is Anti-Christ; their ritual destruction. And I do not believe that Christ, all merciful, will ever say to the least guilty among these—'Absolvo te.' "

There was a long silence. Finally Annan said: "On your side you are more savage than I on mine. I am no missionary——"

"I am. The human being who is not is negligible. I tell you that beauty is good and right. It is salvation. It is the goal. And I tell you that the use of evil is to throw beauty in brighter, more perfect relief. That is its *only* use in art.

"And it never should be the theme, nor bask in the spotlight, nor centre the composition. All its arrows point inward to that one divine and ultimate spot—the touch of highest value in Rembrandt's canvasses—the supreme pinpoint of clarity and glory—Beauty—symmetrical, flawless, eternal."

As they left the club together: "Almost thou persuadest me," said Annan lightly.

Parting, they shook hands: "No, not I," said Coltfoot. "Some sorrow will do that. . . . Or some woman."

Annan turned down Fifth Avenue much amused.

CHAPTER XVII

EARLY in June Rosalind Shore celebrated the 365th performance of her musical comedy.

She got Annan on the telephone just as he was leaving his house to dine wherever fancy suggested.

"Harry Sneyd is giving a supper dance for me," she explained, "and he wants a bunch of names that will look well in to-morrow's papers. Do you mind coming, Barry? Or have you become too darned great to let the public suspect that you know how to frivol?"

"Pity your mother didn't spank the sarcasm out of you while she was getting busy," he retorted. "Where is the frivolling and what time?"

"You nice boy! It's after the show in the directors' suite at *The Looking Glass*. Harry's a director there, also. Mr. Shill let him have the suite. Thank you so much, Barry; I do want all the celebrities I can get, and our publicity department will be grateful to you."

"Glad you feel that way," he said drily.

"Ducky, it does sound like a poor relation touching the Family Hope; but I love you anyway and you know it."

He laughed, hung up, and went his way. Only the florists at the great hotels remained open for business. At one of these he was properly robbed, but the flowers that he sent to Rosalind were magnificent.

He joined half a dozen men of his own world at the Province Club and made one of a group at dinner.

Conversation was the sort of big-town-small-talk passing current as conversation at the majority of such clubs—

Wall Street tattle, social prattle, golfing week-ends, summer plans.

Somebody—Wilkes Bruce—remarked to Annan that his aunt was in town.

The prospect of seeing her cheered him, stirring up that ever latent perverse humour of his, with the prospect of an acrimonious exchange of civilities.

Not that Mrs. Magnelius Grandcourt ever received her nephew willingly; but twice every year matters concerning the estate had to be discussed with him personally.

So Annan knew that before she took herself elsewhere a summons to the presence would arrive for him at No. 3 Governor's Place.

She possessed a horrible house in town—a caricature of a French château—closed most of the year.

In the depths of that dim and over-upholstered stronghold these semi-annual audiences were held. They resembled courts of justice, his aunt sitting, and he the malefactor on parole, reporting at intervals according to law. And he looked forward to these conferences with malicious amusement, if his aunt did not.

After dinner he played cowboy pool with Archie Mallison and Wilkes Bruce, winning as usual. For he did everything with the same facility that characterised his easy speech and manners—accurate without effort, naturally a technician, always graceful.

But a little of his own caste went a long way with Annan. Conversation at The Province, as well as at The Patroons, bored him very soon. So, having neatly disposed of Bruce and Mallison, he retired to the library—the only place he cared about in any club except when some old foozle went to sleep there and snored.

For an hour he dawdled among the great masters of written English, always curious, always charmed, unconsciously aware of a kinship between these immortals and himself.

For perhaps this young man was not unrelated, distantly,

to that noble fellowship, though the subtle possibility had never entered his mind.

So he dallied among pages printed when writing was a fine art—and printing and binding, too; and about midnight he went below, put on his hat, and betook himself to *The Looking Glass*.

In the amusement district the tide of gaiety was still ebbing with the usual back-wash toward cabaret and midnight show.

The Looking Glass was dark and all doors closed, but there were many cars in waiting and a group of gossiping chauffeurs around the private entrance, where a gilded lamp burned.

Through this entrance he sauntered; a lift shot him upward; he disembarked amid a glare of light and a jolly tumult of string-music and laughter.

Somebody took his hat and stick and he walked into the directors' suite of *The Looking Glass*.

There were a lot of people dancing in the handsome board-room—flowers, palms, orchestra—all the usual properties.

The supper room adjoining was gay with jewels and dinner-gowns, clink of silver, tinkle of glass, speeding of waiters flying like black shuttles through some rainbow fabric in the making.

Near the door a girl—one of a group—turned as he strolled up.

“Barry!” she exclaimed, and saluted him in Rialto fashion, with both arms on his shoulders and a typical district kiss.

“Thank you for my flowers, ducky,” added Rosalind, “and you’re a darling to come. Here’s Betsy, by the way—”

“Why, Betsy!” he said, taking her outstretched hands, “when did you arrive from the Coast?”

“Yesterday, my dear, and never was I so glad to see this wretched old town. To hear Californians talk you’d think

you were buying a ticket to the Coast of Paradise. But I notice the Californians remain here——” She took him by both arms: “The same boy. You don’t *look* great. Do you *feel* very great, dear?”

“Perhaps His Greatness needs food to look the part,” suggested Rosalind. “Don’t get us any,” she added, as he turned to pay his devoirs to the others in the group.

He shook hands with Harry Sneyd, bowed to Wally Crawford, encountered the mischievous gaze of Nancy Cassell, and paid his respects to her with gay cordiality.

There were other people, but the flow to and fro between supper and dance cut them off. He noticed Leopold Shill, very shiny, and exchanged a perfectly polite salute with him. Beyond, the thinning black hair and sanguine face of Albert Smull were visible amid groups continually forming and disintegrating.

It came into Annan’s mind that Eris also must have returned from the Coast; and he turned and made the inquiry of Rosalind.

“Why, yes, she’s here somewhere.”

“Where?”

“Probably where the men are thickest,” drawled Rosalind. “If you see a large crowd,—and a burgundy flush,—that’s the suitors of Eris,—and Albert Smull; and you’ll find Eris in the centre of it all.”

Annan laughed and strolled on. For Smull he had no enthusiasm. As for Eris, when he thought of her he felt cordially toward her. But there was now an uneasy and increasing sense of his own neglect to subdue any spontaneous pleasure in meeting her. It annoyed him to feel that he had been guilty of neglect. Until that moment he had not felt any particular shortcoming.

A girl he knew came drifting out of the throng—one of his many and meaningless affinities. They always were glad to see him after the storm and stress of the verbal love affair. So she drifted away in his arms—one of the recent steps—

picked up by him without effort—and they danced the thing out.

Some man took her off. But there were others—plenty—all sorts. He danced enough to amuse him, thinking most of the time about his new story, and now and then of Eris.

Several times the ruddy features of Smull cut his rather hazy line of vision; but he didn't discover anybody resembling Eris in the vicinity.

He had handed his latest partner over to Frank Donnell, and had swung on his heel to avoid a large group of people. And at that moment he saw Eris.

The sheer beauty of the girl startled him, and it was an appreciable moment before he realised that her grey eyes were encountering his.

Annan seldom reddened. He did now. He was not certain, either, but that she was administering a cut direct, because there was no recognition in the grey eyes, no smile.

There were a number of men standing about between them; he hesitated to invite the full snub he deserved. Then he saw her silently disengage herself from the group about her and start directly toward him.

That galvanised him into action—rather brusquely—for he brushed a few stalwart shoulders as he caught the hand she extended in both of his.

“Can't we find some quiet place——” she said unsteadily.

He drew her arm through his and they made their way in silence across the floor toward a vista of offices now banked with palms and flowers and invaded by the few who courted seclusion and each other.

A girl and a man gave them an unfriendly look as they entered the last of the offices, and presently took themselves off.

Eris glanced absently at the chairs they had vacated, then released her arm, turned and walked slowly to the embrasure of the window.

When he came to her she made a little gesture;—he waited.

After a while: "I couldn't control my voice," she said. . . . "I am so happy to see you."

For the first time in his life, perhaps, speech stuck in his glib throat.

She said: "I wondered if you were going to be here. Are you quite well? You seem so."

"And you Eris?"

"Yes;—tired, though."

"You are successful. I've heard that."

"I have very much to learn, Mr. Annan. . . . There seems to be no end to study. . . . But there is no other pleasure or excitement comparable to it."

"Are you still hot on the trail of Truth?" he ventured with a forced smile.

She laughed frankly: "Yes, and do you know that hunting truth doesn't seem to be a popular sport?" Then, more seriously: "Of what value is anything else, Mr. Annan? Why isn't truth more popular? Could you tell me why?"

The old, remembered cry of Eris—"Could you tell me *why?*"—was sounding in his ears again—the same wistful, familiar question.

If Annan had now regained his native equanimity it was entirely due to this girl who had not even deigned to admit any awkwardness in their encounter. And he realised, gratefully, that she was continuing to ignore any lesser detail than the happy fact of reunion.

"So that's your idea of happiness?" he said, gratefully reassured.

"It always was. I told you so long ago."

"I remember." He looked at her, ashamed and sorry that he had had no active part in this charming fruition. Or, rather, it was as yet merely a delicate promise with blossoms still chastely folded. No flower yet.

"It's plain enough," he said, "that you've never lost a moment in self-improvement since you went away nearly a year ago."

"Being with Betsy taught me so much. And Frank Donnell is so wise and gentle. . . . But *you* began it all——"

"Began what?" he demanded.

"I told you that you were the first man of *your* kind I had ever met. That night—in the Park—it was just exactly as though I had gone to sleep deaf, dumb, and blind, and waked up possessed of every faculty——"

"You're loyal to the point of obstinacy," he interrupted. "You owe absolutely nothing to me. All I did was to fail you——"

"Please don't say that, Mr. Annan; you—annoy me when you do——"

"I didn't believe in you. I deserted you——"

"Please—you *hurt* me—when you speak that way——"

"I didn't even continue to write——"

"You were too busy with important things——"

"Eris! Are you really going to overlook my rotten behaviour?"

They both had become nervously excited, although their voices were low. Her protesting hand hesitated toward his arm; his fists were clenched in his pockets,—effort at self restraint:

"You're so square and decent," he said. "When I saw you I realised what a rotter I'd been. You ought to have cut me dead to-night——"

"Oh," she said with a swift intake of breath and her hovering hand a moment on his arm.

After a long silence: "All right," he said almost grimly. He looked up, laughed: "I'm yours, Eris. Everybody else seems to be, too."

Her face, clearing, flushed swiftly, and she gave him a confused look.

"I shan't tease," he said,—back on the old footing in a

twinkling, “—but you do seem to be popular with people. Isn’t it a rather agreeable feeling?”

“Yes. . . . I want to tell you——” She hesitated, laughed hopelessly. “I’m so excited, Mr. Annan, I don’t know how to begin. Why, the things I have to tell you—and the things I have to ask you—would take a year to utter——”

“All the time you’ve been away?” he inquired gaily.

“That must be it. Every day they accumulated. I needed you. . . .” She checked herself, breathless, smiling, the colour bright in her cheeks. “All you have done and are doing,” she said, half to herself, “I have so longed to hear about. All I have tried to do I was crazy to tell you about. . . . And now—I can’t think—remember——”

“We must make another engagement.”

“Please! . . . I was so unhappy about the other one——”

“What hour can you give me, Eris?”

To *give* had been *his* perquisite heretofore. She seemed to so consider it, still.

“Could you spare me a little time to-morrow?” she asked, almost timidly.

“Would you dine with me?”

She said naïvely: “Couldn’t we see each other before to-morrow night? It seems so long——”

The swift charm of her impatience surprised and touched him. Again this young man was rapidly losing his balance in the girl’s candour.

“Whenever you care to see me,” he said, “I’ll come. . . . Any day, any hour.”

She said, with surprise and emotion: “You are very kind to me, Mr. Annan. You always have been——”

“It is you who are kind. You seem unconscious of your own generosity. Will you come to see me, or shall I come to you, Eris?”

“You know,” she explained with happy animation, “I’ve taken the entire floor where I had my room in Jane Street.

It would be quite all right for you to come."

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "Tea?"

"Why—that's not very early——"

"After lunch, then?"

"You *could* come to breakfast," she said with a half shy, half laughing glance. "I was born on a farm and I rise very early. You do, too—I remember——"

"You friendly girl! You bet I'll come!"

"I hate to waste time in sleep," she added, still shy and smiling. . . . "What do you like for breakfast, Mr. Annan? —Oh, I remember. Mrs. Sniffen told me——"

"You surely can't recollect——"

"Yes, I do. . . . Do you think I could ever forget anything that happened there? . . . You breakfast at eight——" She laughed with sheer delight: "That is going to be wonderful, Mr. Annan—to be able to offer you breakfast in my own apartment!"

"And we lunch at the Ritz and dine at my house," he added.

"Wonderful! Wonderful! And I *can* accept, because I have—proper clothes! Isn't it perfectly enchanting—the way it all has turned out?"

That he was quite conscious of the enchantment appeared plain enough to people who chanced to enter the room where they stood together in the recess of the open window.

Several of the men so recently bereaved of Eris evinced an inclination to hover about the vicinity. Once or twice Annan was aware of black hair and ruddy features in the offing—a glimpse of Albert Smull, passing, elaborately oblivious.

"I must tell you," said Eris, making no effort to conceal regret, "that there's a business matter I shall have to attend to in a few minutes. Rosalind insists that the announcement be made this evening. It's a great secret, but I'll tell you: I'm going to have my own company!"

She gave him her hands, laughing, excited by his aston-

ishment and the ardour of his impetuous congratulations.

"Isn't it too splendid! I can scarcely believe it, Mr. Annan. But in our last picture it came to a point where Betsy thought we were, perhaps, interfering with each other—I mean that—that—"

"I understand."

Eris flushed: "Betsy was so sweet and generous about it. But I, somehow, realised that I'd have to go. . . . It was right that I should. . . . And I had a talk with Frank Donnell. . . . I don't know who told Mr. Smull about it, but he telegraphed that he was coming out. He came with Mr. Shill. . . . That was how it happened. Mr. Smull offered me my company. I was thunderstruck, Mr. Annan—"

"You would be, you modest child. It's splendid!—" He kept continually forcing out of his mind the fact of Smull's part in the matter. "It's an astonishing tribute to your talent and character, Eris. Who is your director?"

"Mr. Creevy."

"Oh, Ratford Creevy?"

"Yes. Emil Shunk is our camera man. Mr. Creevy brings his staff with him."

Annan had his opinion of Mr. Creevy, but kept it.

"Well," he repeated, "that's splendid, Eris. I'm astonished,—you wanted me to be, didn't you?—"

She laughed.

"—I'm astounded. And I'm just as happy as you are—you nice, fine girl!—you clever, clever kiddie!—"

They were laughing without reserve, her slim hands still clasped in his; and both turned without embarrassment when Rosalind came leisurely behind them.

"Albert has been chewing his moustache for half an hour," she drawled. "Are you actually spooning, Eris?"

"How silly! Does Mr. Smull want me?"

"We're all set. Leo Shill is to announce it. You're to group with Albert and Ratty Creevy and receive bouquets.

Come, Eris; let that young man's educated hands alone——”

Eris, unconscious until then that Annan still retained her hands, withdrew them without embarrassment. Rosalind passed a beautifully plump arm around her waist, letting her amused glance linger on Annan:

“The immaculate lover,” she drawled, “always busy.” And to Eris: “You’ll like him better, though, after it’s all over,—after the teething, my dear. We all bite on Barry.”

CHAPTER XVIII

ANNAN spent the entire day with Eris; came home at midnight; seated himself at his desk where his work lay in inviting disorder.

But there was no more chance of his working than there was of his sleeping.

It was the first time it ever had happened. He could not remember an instance when the subtle challenge of a disordered manuscript had been declined by him.

But something had happened to this young man. He was in no condition to realise what. His mind, that hitherto faithful ally, seemed incompetent; trivial thoughts thronged its corridors, wandering ideas, irrelevant impressions drifted in agreeable rhythm.

There was a letter from his aunt on his desk. He tore it open; glanced through it without the usual grin; laid it aside.

A slight, rather vacant smile remained on his lips: he kept moving the lapel of his coat and inhaling the odour of a white clove-pink—one of a cluster that had stood in a little rose-bowl between Eris and himself at breakfast.

A pencil, dislodged, rolled over his pad and dropped onto the floor. He let it lie.

Neither work nor sleep attracted him. From the oddly pleasant sense of chaos in his mind always something more definite and more pleasant seemed about to take shape and emerge.

Whatever it was had delicately saturated him: all his being seemed permeated, possessed with the spell of it.

Time after time his mind mechanically began that day

again, drifted through the sequence of events, minute by minute, leading him at length to where he now was seated,—but only to recommence again from the beginning.

About two o'clock he fell asleep, his boyish nose touching the clove-pink. When his head sagged to a more uncomfortable position he awoke, got out of his clothes and went to sleep in the proper place.

The first thing he did after he awoke was to unhook the telephone receiver:

"Is it you, Eris?"

Then a perfectly damning sequence of solicitous inquiries—the regulation and inevitable gamut concerning the young lady's health, night's repose, condition of mind, physical symptoms. Followed a voluntary statement regarding the day before and his intense pleasure in it; then a diffident inquiry, and a hope expressed that she, also, might have found the day not insupportably unpleasant;—surprise and pleasure to learn that she, too, had considered the day "wonderful."

"Could I see you to-day?" he asked.

But she had her hands full, it appeared.

"I'll try to get away after dinner," she said. "Would you telephone about nine-thirty, Mr. Annan?"

"It's a long time—all right, then!"

"I may not be able to get away," she said.

"Don't let me spoil your evening—"

"I had *rather* be with you."

Fluency seemed no longer his: "That's—that's jolly of you—awfully nice of you, Eris,—most kind. . . . I'll call your apartment at nine-thirty, if I may."

"If I can't get away," she said, "could we see each other to-morrow?"

"At *any* hour, Eris!"

"But—your work—"

"That's quite all right. I can always fit *that* in."

"You shouldn't. You should fit *me* in——"

"Nonsense!"

"But *I* shall have to do that, too, when we begin work——"

"I understand that. When may I see you to-morrow, if you can't see me this evening?"

"Will you come to tea?"

"Yes, if I can't come earlier."

She laughed—a distant, gay little laugh—a new sound from her lips, born quite unexpectedly the day before to surprise them both.

"You make our friendship so easy," she said. "You quite reverse conditions. I'm happy and *grateful* that you are coming to tea——"

His unconsidered and somewhat impetuous reply seemed to confuse Eris. There was a silence, then:

"That's the truth," he repeated; "—it *is* a privilege to be with you."

Her voice came, a little wistful, yet humourously incredulous:

"You say such kind things, Mr. Annan. . . . Thank you."

With a buoyant sense of having begun the day right, Annan took a noisy bath, ate every scrap of breakfast, and sat down before his desk in lively spirits, when Mrs. Sniffen had finished with his quarters.

"Xantippe," he said gaily, "do you know that little Miss Odell has become a very clever and promising professional?"

"That baby, sir?"

"That child. What do you think of that, Xantippe?"

Mrs. Sniffen's countenance became grim:

"I 'ope that God may guide her, Mr. Barry,—for there's devils a-plenty hunting out such jobs."

He said: "She's turned out rather a wonderful sort, Xantippe. Sometimes beginners do make good in such a

short time. I've known one or two instances. I've heard of others. Usually there's disaster as an aftermath. They're people who were born to do that one thing *once*. Nothing else. They're rockets. Their capacity is emptied in one dazzling flare-up.

"A burnt-out brain remains. . . . There's no tragedy like it. . . . Consistent failure is less cruel.

"But this girl isn't like that. I'm satisfied. She's merely starting. She's modest, honest, intelligent. You and I bear witness to her courage. And there seems to be no question about her talent. . . . It seems to be one of those instances where circumstance plays second fiddle to Destiny."

He picked up the faded clove-pink, looked at it absently, laid it upon his desk.

"So 'that's that,' as she says sometimes." He looked up smilingly at Mrs. Sniffen, then his smile degenerated into a grin: "Aunt Cornelius is in town. I'm lunching there."

At one o'clock Annan sauntered up to the limestone portal.

"Hello, Jennings," he said genially to a large, severe man who opened the door,—"the three most annoying things in the world are death, hay-fever, and nephews. The last are worst, because more frequent. Kindly prepare Mrs. Grandcourt."

She was already in the drawing-room. She offered him the celebrated hand once compared to Queen Victoria's. He saluted the accustomed pearl—the black one:

"Madame my Aunt, your most obedient——"

Her butler, Seaman, announced luncheon with the reverence of a Second-Adventist. Annan offered his arm to the dumpy old woman.

Only her thin, high-bridged, arrogant nose redeemed her features of a retired charwoman. Watery eyes inspected him across the table; a little withered chin tucked between dewlaps, a sagging, discontented mouth, a mottled skin, concluded the ensemble.

White lace collar and cuffs turned over the black gown

did what was sartorially possible for Mrs. Magnelius Grandcourt. Otherwise, the famous string of cherry-sized pearls dangled to what should have been her waist.

"It appears," she said, "that you still inhabit your alley."

"Yes, Barry-in-our-alley," he said cheerfully.

"When are you going to move to a suitable neighbourhood?" she inquired with that peculiar pitch of tone usually, in her sex, indicative of displeasure.

"I like to be quaint," he explained, grinning.

After a pause and a shift to the next course: "I don't know where you get your taste for squalour," she said. "You didn't inherit it."

"Didn't one of our ancestors haunt bar-maids?" he enquired guilelessly. "I always understood that was where we acquired our bar-sinister——"

"Come, Barry," she said sharply; sat staring at him in a cold rage that Seaman's ears should have been polluted by such a pleasantry.

Annan's interior was riotous with laughter and his features crimsoned with it. But he only gazed inquiringly at his aunt; and the wretched incident waned.

They went into the library after luncheon. A secretary brought the necessary papers.

Annan's was a cheerful nature. There was no greed in it. In all questions, that might properly have become disputes concerning joint income and investment, he yielded good humouredly to her.

There was a more vulgar streak than thrift in Mrs. Magnelius Grandcourt. The majority of rich are infected with it.

However, family matters settled to her satisfaction, she seemed inclined to a more friendly attitude.

"That was very impudent of you to send me that New York Directory," she said, "but I suppose you intended it to be a pleasantry."

"Why, no," he said innocently, "I thought it would

gratify you to discover so many people you didn't care to know——”

“Barry! I see nothing humorous in it. Do you think the breaking down of society is humorous?”

“Is it breaking down?”

“Do I need to answer you? What has become of the old barriers that kept out undesirables? *Once* there was a society in New York. Is there to-day? No, Barry;—only a fragment here and there.

“Only a few houses left where we rally. This house, thank God, is one of them. And while *I* live and retain my faculties, I shall continue to dictate my visiting list, here and in Newport, and shall properly censor it, despite the unbecoming mockery of my own flesh and blood——”

“Nonsense, Aunt Cornelius, it's only in fun, not ill-natured. I can't take such matters solemnly. Who the devil cares who you are to-day? It's what you *do*. You're no longer a rarity in an uncouth town. There are too many like you—quite as wealthy, cultivated, experienced—plenty of people who can give the denizens inhabiting any of the social puddles a perfectly good time.

“There isn't any society. There never has been a real one since Washington was President. What passed for it you helped boss very cleverly. But it gradually swelled and burst—like one of those wobbly stars—scattered into a lot of brilliant little fragments, each a perfectly good star in itself——”

“What you say is utterly absurd,” interrupted his aunt, wrathfully. “By tradition there is and can be only one society in America. Its accepted rendezvous is in New York; its arbiters are so by birth. Theirs is an inherited trust. They are its censors. I shall never violate what I was born to respect and uphold.”

“Well,” he said, smiling, “I suppose you really consider me a renegade and a low fellow because I entertain the public with my stories.”

"A public entertainer has his proper place, Barry."

"Sure. On the doorstep. That's where we once were told to sit—authors, players, painters—the whole job-lot of us. Now we prefer it, although since your youth society welcomes anybody that can amuse it. We go in, now and then. But it's better fun outside. So I'm going to sit there and tell my stories to the hoi-polloi as they pass along. If what you consider society wishes to listen it can stick its head out of the window."

"It is amazing to me," she said, staring at him out of watery eyes, "how utterly common my brother's son can be. I can *not* understand it, Barry. And you are not alone in this demoralization. Young people everywhere are infected. Only a week or two ago I met Elizabeth Blythe in California. She was painted a perfectly ghastly colour in broad daylight. Elizabeth Blythe—the daughter of Courtlandt Blythe, a painted, motion-picture *actress*!"

It was impossible for him to control his laughter.

"She told me that you snubbed her," he said. "But you don't seem to be consistent, Aunt Cornelia. I hear that you've been civil and kind to another actress. I mean Eris Odell."

"Do *you* know her?" inquired his aunt calmly.

"I've met her."

Mrs. Grandcourt remained silent for a while, her pale eyes fixed on her nephew.

"That girl's grandmother was my beloved comrade in boarding school," she said slowly. "We shared the same room. Her name was Jeanne d'Espremont. Her grandmother was that celebrated Countess of the time of Louis XV. . . . They were Louisiana Creoles. Her blood was as good as any in France. Probably that means nothing to a modern young man. . . . It meant something to me. . . . I shouldn't have wished to love a nobody as I loved Jeanne d'Espremont."

Mrs. Grandcourt bent her head and looked down at her

celebrated Victorian hands. Pearls bulged on the tiny, fat fingers.

"Jeanne ran away," she said. "She married the son of a planter. His family was unimpeachable, but he looked like a fox. When he drank himself to death she went on the stage.

"She had a baby. I saw it. It looked like a female fox. Jeanne died when the girl was sixteen. . . . I'd have taken her,—"

Presently Annan asked why she hadn't done so.

"Because," said his aunt, "she married a boy who peddled vegetables the day after the funeral. His name was Odell."

"Oh! Was he the father of Eris?"

"He was. And is. . . . What an astonishing reversion to the lovely, aristocratic type of her grandmother. . . . I encountered her by accident. She was with Elizabeth Blythe, but she was not painted. . . . I assure you, Barry, it was a severe shock to me. She is the absolute image of her grandmother. . . . She startled me so. . . . I never was emotional. . . . But—I could scarcely speak—scarcely find my voice—to ask her. . . . But I *knew*. The girl was Jeanne d'Espremont, *alive*."

After a moment: "Did you find her interesting?" he asked.

"She has all the charm and intelligence of her grandmother. . . . And all her lovely appeal. And her fatal obstinacy."

"Obstinacy?"

"Yes. . . . I told her about her grandmother. I asked her to give up her profession and come to me—" Mrs. Grandcourt's features grew red:—"I offered to stand her sponsor, educate her properly, give her the position in the younger set to which her blood entitled her. . . . I offered to endow her, Barry. . . . I think now you understand how I loved her grandmother."

The idea of his aunt parting willingly with a penny so

amazed and entranced the young man that he merely gazed at her incapable of comment.

His aunt rose,—signal that the audience was ended. Annan got up.

“Do you mean,” he said, “that she declined to give up her profession for such a prospect?”

“Not only that,” replied his aunt, getting redder, “but she refused to accept a dollar. . . . And she hasn’t a penny except her salary. That is like her grandmother, never permitting a favour that she could not return. . . . Jeanne was poor, compared to me, Barry—my little comrade, Jeanne d’Espremont. . . . I loved her. . . . dearly. . . .”

Annan coolly put both arms around his aunt and kissed her—a thing that had not occurred since he was in college.

“I’ll drop in for tea before you beat it to Newport,” he said. “Then you tell me some more about Jeanne d’Espremont.”

He gave her another hearty smack and went out gaily, leaving Mrs. Magnelius Grandcourt with glassy, astonished eyes, and a little, selfish, tucked-in mouth that was slightly quivering.

CHAPTER XIX

THE day was warm enough to be uncomfortable. Except in recesses of parks, New York is never fragrant. Once it was—when the odour of lindens filled the Broadway from the Fort to St. Paul's. Wild birds sang in every street. Washington was President. Green leaves and scent and song are gone where “The Almond Tree shall flourish,” deep planted in the heart of man.

As far as perfume is concerned, neither the eastward avenues nor cross-streets suggested Araby to Annan. He carried, as usual, a large pasteboard box full of flowers.

Jane Street runs west out of Greenwich Avenue. Shabby red brick buildings with rusty fire-escapes, lofts, stables, a vista of swarming tenements through which runs a sagging pavement set with pools of water—and, on the south side, half a dozen rickety three-story-and-basement houses—this is Jane Street.

The little children of the poor shrilled and milled about him as he threaded his way among push-cart men and trucks and mounted the low stoop of the house where Eris lived.

It seemed clean enough inside as he climbed the narrow stairs, manœuvering his big box full of flowers.

He could hear her negro maid-of-all-work busy in the kitchen as he knocked,—hear her call out gaily: “Miss Eris! Miss Eris, somebody’s knockin’ an’ I can’t leave mah kitchen——”

Came the light sound of feet dancing along the hall, the door jerked open in his face, sudden vision of grey eyes and bobbed chestnut hair; the swift bright smile:

"Good morning!"—her offered hand, cool and fresh in his. "*More* flowers? But yesterday's flowers are perfectly fresh! *Thank* you, Mr. Annan, *so* much——"

She was the most engaging person to give things to—anything, no matter how trivial—and her delight and child-like lack of restraint were refreshing reward to a young man accustomed to feminine sophistication.

Any sort of a package excited her, and she lost no time in opening it.

Now, with her arms full of iris and peonies, she exclaimed her delight again, again made her personal gratitude a charming reward out of all proportion to the gift.

"If you'll turn on the water in the bath-tub," she said, "I'll lay them there until I can find something to put them in."

This was the usual procedure. He had sent her a lot of inexpensive glass bowls, jars and vases. He now gave the flowers a bath while she ran to the pantry and came back with half a dozen receptacles.

Together they arranged the flowers and carried them into the three rooms of the little apartment which, already, was blossoming like a Persian garden. And all the while their desultory chatter continued—fragments left from their last parting—gossip resumed, unasked questions held over and now remembered, punctuated by the girl's unspoiled pleasure in every blossom that she chose and placed.

Breakfast was ready when they were—the sort of breakfast she remembered he liked.

Nothing about Eris seemed to have been spoiled—least of all her appetite. He thought it charmingly childish, and it always amused him. Besides, the girl's lovely freshness in the morning always fascinated him. Only children turned unblemished faces to the morning in New York.

Together in the cool living-room, after breakfast, they settled for a happy, busy morning—the business of exchang-

ing thoughts, including vast material for discussion accumulated over night.

After a year's absence, and in the sudden sun-burst of their reunion, Eris was venturing more and more in the art of conversation. With Annan, diffidence, shyness were vanishing in their new and happy intimacy. She was learning to withhold from him nothing that concerned the things of the mind. Its pleasures she hastened to surrender to him; its perplexities she offered him with a wistful candour that constantly was stirring depths within him hitherto obscurely stagnant.

All these—her personality, the physical loveliness of the girl—were subtly obsessing him, usurping intellectual routine when he was away, crowding other thoughts, colouring his mental process, interfering with its clarity when he worked—interrupting charmingly—as though her light touch on his sleeve had arrested his pen.

She was asking him now about the progress of his new novel: he was lighting a cigarette, and he looked up over the burning match:

“It's an inert lump,” he said. “I come in and give it a kick but it doesn't even squirm.”

“Why?” she asked, concerned.

He lighted his cigarette. There was a mischievous glimmer in his eyes:

“Probably it's sulking because I'm having a better time with you.”

“You're not serious!”

“Yes, I am. That fool of a novel is jealous. That's what's the matter with it, Eris.”

“If I believed that,” she said with a troubled smile, “I'd not go near you.”

“That would be murderous, Eris.”

“How?”

“Why, I'd go home and kick that novel to death.”

Her light laughter was not wholly free of concern:

"I've thought sometimes," she said, "that perhaps our mornings together might take a little of the freshness *out* of you, Mr. Annan. . . . Take *something* from your work. . . . You're so nice about it—but you mustn't let me——"

"Nonsense. Even if it were true I'm not going to let anything spoil our intellectual——" he hesitated,—"honeymoon," he added with the faintest malice in his laugh.

"What a delightful idea!" she exclaimed. "That's what this week has been, hasn't it!—on *my* part, anyway. But of course you don't feel——"

"I do, madam. Do you acknowledge our intellectual alliance?"

"Yes, but——"

"That settles it. You can't honeymoon by yourself, can you?"

She thought him delightfully ridiculous. But a faint misgiving persisted:

"About your novel," she began,—and he laughed and said:

"Well, what about it?"

"When will you begin again?"

"How long will our honeymoon last?"

"That isn't fair——"

"Yes, it is. How long, Eris?"

She laughed at his absurdity: "Forever, with me," she said. "So you might as well begin work now as later."

"Hasn't our honeymoon interfered a little with your work?" he asked lightly.

"Of course not. It's been the most stimulating of tonics, Mr. Annan."

"Well, it's overstimulated me, perhaps. I can't keep my feet on the earth,—I float——"

"You're lazy!"

"Blissfully, Eris. . . . Eris! . . . Eris, immortal goddess of eternal discord. . . . Who gave you that lovely, ominous name?"

"The ironical physician who brought me into the world, I believe. . . . I believe I was well named."

"You don't create discord."

"I seem to; from birth," she said absently. She bent over a mass of rose-scented white peonies, inhaling the slightly aromatic perfume.

Watching her, he said: "It's hard for me to realise that you've ever had troubles."

"It's hard for me, too," she brushed her lips against the delicate, crisp petals. "Troubles," she said, "become unreal when one's mind remains interested. . . . I can't even remember how it feels to be unhappy. . . . A busy mind forgets unessentials like trouble."

He said: "You're rather amazing at times, do you know it?"

"Why?"

He smiled: "Also," he said, "there's an incongruity about this honeymoon of ours, Eris."

"Where, Mr. Annan?"

"Between your lips and mine—when you say 'Mr. Annan' and I answer, 'Eris.' And on our honeymoon, too," he added gravely.

Her laughter was a little confused.

"It seems natural for me to call you Mr. Annan. One is not likely to think familiarly of famous people—"

"Is it a horrible sort of bourgeois respect for the mystery of my art, Eris?"

She abandoned herself to laughter as his features grew gloomier.

"You are funny," she said, "but one's first impressions of people are not easily altered. . . . Would you wish me to call you—Barry?"

"If consistent with your commendable and proper awe of me."

For a moment or two she was unable to control her laughter. Then a moment's hesitation, bright-eyed, flushed:

"Barry," she said, like a child plucking courage from embarrassment.

She had some books to show him from a list she had asked him to make after one of their conferences on self-improvement.

They went over them together, she ardently intent on the unread pages, he conscious of her nearness; the faint, warm perfume of her bent head.

Her mantel-clock struck and she looked up incredulously.

"Yes," he said, "you've got to go."

"It *can't* be noon, can it?"

"I'll drive you to the studio."

She called: "Hattie! Have you put up my *lunch*?"

"All ready, Miss Eris, honey!"

There was a silence, Eris gazing absently at the outrageous mantel-clock, Annan's eyes on her face.

She drew a long, even breath: "Time—and its hours—like a flight of bullets. . . . When can you come again?"

"Any day—any hour you can give me—"

"No. . . . You *will* begin work again, won't you?" She turned toward him.

"I can't, yet."

"Why?"

"I suppose it's because I'm so preoccupied with you."

"But—that isn't possible!" She seemed so frankly perplexed and disturbed that he said:

"No, that isn't the reason. . . . I don't know what it is."

"Are you tired, perhaps?" she asked with a winning concern in her voice, that now always seemed to stir within him those vague depths hitherto unsuspected.

Her mantel-clock tinkled the quarter-hour.

They both looked up at it.

"Well," he said, "you must go to *your work*."

"It's annoying, isn't it?"

"It's the way I feel about *my* work, too," he said. "I'd rather be with you."

For a moment she did not notice the analogy. Then she turned and her face flushed in comprehension.

Neither spoke for a moment. Then she rose, went to her bedroom, pulled on her hat, and came slowly out, not looking at him.

As she moved toward the door his hand, lightly, then his arm detained her, drew her to him face to face, held her in slightest contact.

There was a damp sweetness to her mouth as he kissed it. She did not change colour,—there was no emotion. Smooth, cool, her face touched his—softly cool her relaxed hand that he took into his.

He looked into grey eyes that looked back. He kissed a fresh mouth that yielded like a flower but did not quiver.

Released, she stood apart, slender, still, not aloof, nor altered visibly by the moment's intimacy.

The little clock struck the half hour.

He came to her, drew her head back against his face.

"You'll have to go," he said. "Will you let me drive you up to the studio? We'll have time."

She nodded; they went slowly to the door, down to the hot street in silence.

On Greenwich Avenue, near the new theatre, still in process of building, they found a taxi.

When they descended at the studio she was just on time.

"Thank you so much," she said, not offering him her hand.

"To-morrow, Eris?" he asked.

"I can't. I'm called for ten o'clock."

"In the evening, then?"

"I'm dining with Mr. Smull."

"Could you lunch with me the day after that?"

"I'm sorry."

A pause: "Are you offended?" he asked in a low voice.

She looked up, slightly shook her head.

"You don't seem very anxious to see me again," he added, forcing a smile.

In the eyes of the girl he read neither response nor any comment.

"I won't detain you now," he said. "I'm sorry you seem to be unable to see me soon."

"I hope you will feel like working soon," she said quietly.

"I'll begin in a day or so. . . . Are you free day after to-morrow, at any time?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Could you come to dinner?"

His features altered swiftly: "You charming, generous girl! Of course I'll come——"

"Good-bye," she nodded, and turned away into the portal where the door-keeper on duty stood watching them.

CHAPTER XX

EXCEPT for one disquieting symptom, Annan had no reason to suppose that his budding affair with Eris was to develop and terminate differently from other agreeable interludes in his airy career.

That symptom was a new one—an odd disinclination to work because his mind was preoccupied with a girl.

No other tender episodes in this young man's career had interfered with his creative ability. On the contrary, they had stimulated it.

Always he had taken such incidents gaily; always he remained receptive, not seeking; the onus of initiative equally shared; the normal end a mutual enlightenment, not too tragic, and with the germ of future laughter always latent, even quickening under tears.

There never had been any passion in these affairs—not on his part anyway—unless a passion for the analysis of reactions counted, and a passionate desire to comprehend beauty, physical and intellectual; its multiple motives, responsibilities, and penalties.

Partly experimental, partly sympathetically responsive, always tenderly curious, this young man drifted gratefully through the inevitable episodes to which all young men are heir.

And something in him always transmuted into ultimate friendship the sentimental chaos, where comedy and tragedy clashed at the crisis.

The result was professional knowledge. Which, however, he had employed rather ruthlessly in his work. For

he resolutely cut out all that had been agreeable to the generations which had thriven on the various phases of virtue and its rewards. Beauty he replaced with ugliness; dreary squalor was the setting for crippled body and deformed mind. The heavy twilight of Scandinavian insanity touched his pages where sombre shapes born out of Jewish Russia moved like anachronisms through the unpolluted sunshine of the New World.

His were essays on the enormous meanness of mankind—mean conditions, mean minds, mean aspirations, and a little mean horizon to encompass all.

Out of his theme, patiently, deftly, ingeniously he extracted every atom of that beauty, sanity, inspired imagination which *makes* the imperfect more perfect, creates *better* than the materials permit, *forces* real life actually to assume and *be* what the passionate desire for sanity and beauty demands.

For we become, visibly, what the passionate purpose of the strongest among us demands. Bodies and minds alter in the irresistible demand for beauty and sanity.

It is the fixed, inexorable aspiration of the strong that has moved mankind out of its own natal ugliness—so far upon the long, long journey toward sanity, beauty, and the stars.

The old, old story: beauty is obvious and becomes trite: the corruption from whence it sprung is the only interest. Not the flower but the maggots in the manure which nourishes it; not symmetry, but the causes that deform it; not sanity but the microbes which undermine it.

Shadows everywhere framing a black abyss where, deep in obscurity, cause and effect writhe endlessly like two great worms. . . .

And he became uneasy and uncomfortable and perplexed because he seemed to be disinclined to continue work.

Eris was interfering. The damp sweetness of her mouth,

her cool fresh body, the still clarity of gray eyes, hands that lay in his lightly as dawn-chilled flowers. . . .

Neither intention of mind and pen—nor even effort where, hitherto, inspiration and mechanics had so suavely co-ordinated—seemed to replace him and reassure him in that easy security from whence, hitherto, he had inspected mankind.

An indefinable subconsciousness was becoming a restlessness shared by mind and body. And it finally set him adrift from club to avenue—trivial resources of those who depend upon externals for occupation.

Never before had Annan been at loss to know how to entertain his mind. He had been an amusing host to himself. Now, for the first time he was aware of a sort of obscure impatience with the entertainment. Not that his was becoming the sordid state of mind of the time-killer—most contemptible of unconscious suicides and slowest of any to enter that meaningless void for which such human phantoms are fitted.

But it seemed that something was lacking to make self-entertainment worth while. Exactly what this was he did not know. There was effort now where none ever had been. And that effort was the initiative of a mind seeking, for the first time, its complement, vaguely, blindly irritated by its own incompleteness.

He went to see his aunt, but she wasn't very glad to see him.

The reason he called on her was to talk about Eris, but Mrs. Grandcourt bluntly inquired what his interest might be in an actress, and suggested that he mind his business and try to foregather with women of his own caste.

"Isn't she?" he asked rather rashly.

But she, old, wise, disillusioned, and with a sort of weary comprehension of men, made it plain that the granddaughter of Jeanne d'Espremont concerned herself alone.

As he was taking his leave:

"I can imagine," she remarked, "nothing as contemptible as any philandering with this child by any man of my race."

He went out with that in his ear.

It bored him all day. Finally it interested him. Because that is exactly what would have happened in one of his own stories—

Abruptly he was conscious that it *was* happening. That this had to do with his restlessness. That possibly it was desire to see this girl which was disturbing him.

He realised, now, that he wanted to see Eris; was impatient at delay. Well, that was interesting anyway. And, now that the possible cause of discomfort seemed clearer, he decided to examine and analyse it coolly, professionally. . . .

Toward one o'clock in the morning, dead tired, he gave it up. The cause of restlessness still abided with him. He fell asleep, weary of visualisation—young eyes, crystal-grey, that told him nothing, answered nothing—eyes virginal, unaware, immaculate, incorruptible.

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN Annan arrived at the Jane Street apartment, Eris had just telephoned Hattie, the negro maid, that she had been detained at the studio; would be late; and to say this to Mr. Annan.

So constantly yet unconsciously during the two days' separation had he visualised this meeting, pictured it to the least detail, that this slight delay in realisation tightened a nervous tension of which he had been aware all day.

It was rather ridiculous; he had seen her only two days before. It had seemed much longer. Also, knowledge of her dinner engagement with Albert Smull had not quieted his impatience. But there had been nothing to do about it except to send her fresh roses and a great sheaf of lilies. Over the telephone he told Hattie to place these in her bedroom before she returned.

So now he picked up the evening paper in the little living room and composed himself to wait.

The culinary clatter of Hattie in the kitchen came to him fitfully; shrill voices from ragged children at play in the sunset-flooded street; the grinding roar of motor trucks herded like leviathans toward their west-side corrals; the eternal jar and quiver of the vast, iron city. Otherwise, silence; a heated stillness in the isolated abode of Eris, "Daughter of Discord"; the subdued breath of his roses in the air, which glimmered with gilded sun-dust; red rays from the west painted across the eastern wall. And, possessing all, a hushed magic—a spell invisible—the intimacy of this absent girl;—its mystery, everywhere—in the

shadowy doorway beyond, from which stole the scent of unseen lilies. . . .

So intimate, so part of her seemed everything that even his roses appeared intruders here in the rosy demi-dusk where sun rays barred door and window of her sanctuary with barriers of crimson fire.

The evening paper had slipped to the floor. His speculative eyes, remote, were fixed on the red rods of waning light: he sat upright, unstirring, in the attitude of one who hears without listening, but awaits the unheard.

She came up the stairs, running lightly; flung open the door ajar, greeted him with a little gasp of happy, breathless recognition.

When she could explain at her ease: "Frank Donnell is patching in and re-taking with me before Mr. Creevy begins. To-morrow we finish, and the day after—" she laughed excitedly, "—I begin with my own company!"

"Wonderful!" he admitted; "I hope you'll be as happy and as fortunate with your new director, Eris."

"I hope so. I'm very fond of Mr. Donnell—" She pulled off her blue turban, glanced over her shoulder into the mirror, turned and looked happily at Annan. Then her smile faded. "Aren't you well?" she asked.

"Certainly I am. Why?"

"I thought—you seemed thin—a trifle tired—"

"Bored," he nodded briefly.

"Why?" she demanded, astonished.

"I don't know. Probably because I've missed you."

Recognising only a jest in kindness meant, she smiled response and went into her bed-room.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "my room is full of lilies!" She came to the door, inarticulate with gratitude, exaggerating, as always, kindness of giver and beauty of gift; then in-

adequately thanked him—invited him to enter and see where Hattie had placed his flowers.

“Don’t sleep with them; they’ll give you a headache,” he remarked.

For a little while she lingered over the scented flowers. Then there was just a moment’s hesitation; and, as he did not seem inclined to leave, she seated herself at her dressing table, shook out her bobbed hair—fleeting revelation of close-set ears and nape milk-white under thickest chestnut curls.

Deftly she re-parted, re-tothed, coaxed, petted, intent upon her business with this soft, crisp shock of curls. Her every movement fascinated him—the twisted grace of her lithe back, celerity of slender wrist and fingers,—white!—oh, so white and swift and sure! . . .

He bent and touched her head with his lips. Movement ceased instantly; hovering hands froze stiff, suspended; she sat as motionless as the lilies in her room.

After a moment’s wordless silence, manual activity ventured to resume, tentatively, with little intervals of hesitation—silent, intent, inquiring perhaps; perhaps inherent apprehension which turns the feminine five senses into ears.

“You want the place to yourself,” he said, as coolly as he could; and sauntered into the living-room. Where he resumed the evening paper as though impatient to read it. But his eyes watched her closing door; rested there.

Before she reappeared, Hattie waddled into view to announce dinner. Annan, pacing the room, impatient of his own restlessness, turned nervously as Eris opened her door. She wore a thin black gown—nothing to relieve its slim and sombre simplicity except the snowy skin and the cheek’s rose-warmth shadowed by gold-red hair.

She smiled her confidence; invited him with extended hand. He took possession of her cool, bare arm, walked slowly with her to the dining-room, seated her, touched her hair lightly with his cheek.

For all his fluency he found no word to link the liaison—nothing to smooth the slight contact of caress.

She drew his attention to the rose beside his service plate: he leaned toward her; she picked up the bud and drew it through his lapel without embarrassment.

In the girl's slight smile suddenly Annan found his tongue. And now, as always, his easy flow of speech began to stimulate her to an increasing facility of response.

Hers, too, was now the initiative as often as his; she told him gaily about the closing hours at the studio under Frank Donnell's directorship; all about the assembling of her own company under Mr. Creevy; about her new camera-man, Emil Shunk; the search for stories; the several continuities still under consideration. She spoke warmly of Albert Smull, and of his partner, Leopold Shill; of their constant generosity to her, and of her determination that they should never regret their belief in her ability to make their investment profitable.

"It seems to me," she said, "so amazing, so wonderful, that such keen business men should venture to risk so much on a girl they scarcely know, that it frightens me at moments."

"Don't worry," he remarked with a shrug; "it's a more interesting gamble for them than the stock-market offers these days. They're having their fun out of it—Shill, Smull & Co."

"Oh! Do you think it's quite that?" she asked, flushing.

"Well," he replied, "every enterprise is a risk of sorts, isn't it? To take a chance is always amusing. Nothing flatters like picking a winner on one's own best judgment. You're what Broadway calls 'sure fire.' It doesn't take much courage to lay odds on you, Eris."

She nodded, her colour still high: "Yes, I suppose Mr. Smull looks at it that way. It really is a matter of business, of course. . . . But he is very kind to me."

"If it were anything except a matter of business it would scarcely do, would it?" asked Annan carelessly.

"I don't think I understand. Please tell me."

"I mean—it's quite all right for a man to bet on a girl if he believes her professionally capable. That's finance—of one sort. That's a business investment."

"What other sort of investment is there?" she asked.
"Will you tell me?"

"The other sort is to finance an enterprise out of—friendship. That's not legitimate—on either side. . . . And even when it's sheer business it's a ticklish one."

She remained absorbed for a while in her own reflections. Then, idling over her strawberries and orange ice: "Do you think that a girl really has no right to accept such heavy responsibility as is now mine?" she inquired.

"I'm thinking about your obligations—burdensome in success, crushing in failure. . . . Because you are the kind of girl who will so consider them."

"What kind of girl do you mean?"

"Conscientious."

"Of course."

"But too sensitive, too generous, too easily overwhelmed by a sense of obligations—mostly imaginary."

She continued with her reflections and her strawberries. Finally coffee was served; he lighted a cigarette. Eris had not yet commented upon his final proposition.

"It really depends on the man," he remarked, "how difficult or how easy a girl's position is to be. It's always certain to be difficult if the deal be merely a speculation in friendship and not in business."

She tasted her coffee: "Yes, it might be—perplexing," she said.

"You see the possibility of confusion?—gratitude worrying about what is expected of it; dread of reproach for benefits forgot—the mask to choose and wear in the lively hope of benefits to come—no; speculation in friendship is

never legitimate gambling. It's bad business, bad sportsmanship."

She considered this over her coffee, her serious eyes intent on the flecks of foam in her cup, with which she played with her little silver spoon.

"Do you think," she said slowly, "that Mr. Smull is taking a legitimate chance in financing my company?"

"You're a perfectly legitimate risk. I told you so. You're sure fire."

She looked up: "Do you think that was Mr. Smull's motive?"

"I don't know, Eris."

After a pause: "You don't like him, do you?"

"Not much."

"Will you tell me why?"

"I'm not quite sure why. . . . Do you like him, Eris?"

"I'd be ashamed not to."

"Because he's kind?"

"Yes."

"That's why you say you like me," observed Annan, smiling.

She smiled, too, rather vaguely.

"Is that the reason you like me, Eris?" he persisted—"because you consider me kind?"

"What do you think it is?" she murmured, still smiling a little to herself.

"I'm not certain you like me as well as you once did."

The boy obvious, suddenly! The eternal and beloved ass that every woman is destined to meet. And forgive.

"I—think I do," she said.

"Like me as well as you once did?"

"Yes."

"Oh! My conversation still amuses you. But otherwise—well, I'm afraid you don't care quite as much for me as you did, Eris."

"Why?"—with slow lifted eyes.

"Because I kissed you."

The ass obvious, at last!

She made no reply. Perhaps he hoped for shy denial—for some diffident evasion anyway. Her unembarrassed silence troubled him because he had not really harboured the fear he pretended.

Now, however, the possibility made him uneasy.

"Glance into your mirror, Eris," he said lightly, "and tell me how I could have helped what I did."

Her face, partly averted, remained so, unflushed, unresponsive.

Hattie opened the kitchen door and looked in, bulking like a vast, dark cloud.

"You may come in and clear up," said Eris quietly. She rose from the table and they walked into the farther room and seated themselves, she on the sofa, with an untroubled aloofness that did not encourage him to closer approach than a chair pulled up opposite her.

She had turned to some of his flowers as though to include them in a friendly circle.

"Your roses are such heavenly company," she said in a low voice.

"I never knew anybody so charmingly interested in flowers," he said with smiling malice.

She understood, laughed, turned to him.

"I'm interested, also, to hear how your novel is progressing," she said.

"It isn't."

"Haven't you worked?" she inquired with sweet concern.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because," he said deliberately, "my mind is too full of you to contain anything else."

A pause: "Then," she said, "you had better not see me until you feel inclined to resume work."

"You don't seem to care very much," he remarked.

She was looking again at the roses. She made no reply. The cold, rosy loveliness of her enthralled and chilled him. Where the chestnut hair touched her cheek a carnation flush warmed the slight shadow.

"I'll resume work," he said abruptly.

She nodded, her face close to the roses.

"How would you like me to make a scenario of my last novel for you?" he asked. He had prepared this surprise during the two days' separation—had even visualised her delight.

If he expected emotional response, the impulsive gratitude that hitherto had so charmingly over-valued his little gifts, he was to be stunningly disappointed.

She turned and looked at him out of frankly troubled eyes; and from that moment he learned that whatever he ever was to have from this girl would be only what her honesty could offer.

"I couldn't play such a part," she said. . . . "You are most kind. . . . But I never could be able to do it."

"Why? Do you think it would prove too difficult?"

"Yes, . . . too difficult . . . because I don't believe in such a part—or in such a character."

He sat thunderstruck. Then he flushed to the temples and the last rag of masculine condescension fell from him, leaving him boyishly bewildered and chagrined.

"Do you mean that you don't *like* the story?" he asked incredulously.

"I like the way you wrote it. But my opinion is of no value. Everybody says it is a great novel. Betsy told me that the whole country is madly discussing it. Everybody who can judge such things knows that it is a very wonderful book. So does it matter what I think——"

"It does, to *me*," he said almost savagely. "Why don't you like it, Eris?"

She was silent, and his tone changed: "Won't you tell me why?" he pleaded.

Again the order reversed—the eternal cry of Eris on *his* lips, now,—he, her court of appeal, appealing to her,—in mortified quest of knowledge,—of truth, perhaps,—or, astonished, wounded in snobbery and pride, seeking some remedy for the surprising hurt—some shred of his former authority to guide her back into the attitude which now he realised had meant so much to unconscious snobbery and happy vanity.

And now Eris knew that their hour for understanding had arrived. She had much to say to him. Her clasped hands tightened nervously in her lap but the level eyes were steady.

She said, very slowly: “I have known unhappiness, Mr. Annan. And ugliness. And hardship. But I’d be ashamed to let my mind dwell upon these things. . . . Stories where life begins without hope and continues hopelessly, seem needless and more or less distorted. And rather cowardly. . . . One’s mind dwells most constantly on what one likes. . . . I do not like deformity. Also, it is not the rule; it is the exception. . . . So is ugliness. And evil. A little seasons art sufficiently. . . . Only beasts eat garlic wholesale. . . . Those who find perpetual interest in misshapen minds and bodies and souls are either physicians or are themselves in some manner misshapen. . . . Unhappiness, ugliness, squalor, misery, evil,—in the midst of these, or of the even more terrible isolation of the lonely mind,—always one can summon courage to dream nobly. . . . And what one dares dream one can become,—inwardly always,—often outwardly and actually.”

She lifted her deep, grey eyes to his reddened face.

“I do admire you, and your mind, and your skill in attainment. But I have not been able to comprehend the greatness of what you write, and what all acclaim. . . . I do not like it. I can not.

“I could neither understand nor play such a character as the woman in your last book. . . . Nor could I ever

believe in her. . . . Nor in the ugliness of her world—the world you write about, nor in the dreary, hopeless, malformed, starving minds you analyse. . . . My God, Mr. Annan—are there no wholesome brains in the world you write about? . . . I'm sorry. . . . You know that I am ignorant, not experienced, crude—trying to learn truths, striving to see and understand. . . . I have not travelled far on any road. But I shall never live long enough to travel the road you follow, nor shall I ever comprehend such vision, such intention, such art as you have mastered. . . . You are a master. I do believe that. . . . Always you have remained very wonderful to me. . . . Your mind. . . . Your wisdom. . . . *You.*"

She clasped her slender fingers tighter over her knees but looked at him out of clear, intelligent eyes that seemed almost black in their purplish depths.

"With me," she said, "the love of beauty, and the belief in it, give me all my strength. I need to believe in beauty: it is my first necessity. . . . And remains my last. . . . And I never have discovered a truth that is not beautiful. . . . There is no ugliness, no evil in Truth."

He got to his feet slowly, and began to walk about the room in an aimless, nervous way, as though under some vague, indefinite menace,—of proven inferiority, perhaps.

Reaction set in toward boyish self-assertion; and it came with a sudden rush,—and a forced laugh that, unexpectedly to her, exposed his wound.

Surprised that he had suffered such a one, incredulous that so slight a mind as hers had dealt it, she sat watching him. Gradually all the bright hardness in her gaze melted to a tender grey. Yet, it seemed incredible that so slight a creature as she could matter to him intellectually,—could have hurt so brilliantly armoured a being.

And then, all suddenly, she realised she had hurt a boy and not a mind.

He came to her where she was seated, took her hands

from her lap, looked wretchedly into her eyes, starry now with imminence of tears.

"All that really matters," he said, "is that your mind should forgive mine and your heart care for mine."

His clasp was drawing her to her feet; and she stood up, not resisting, not confused, nor betraying any emotion visible to him, unless he understood the starry brilliancy of her young eyes.

"I'm falling in love with you, Eris. That is the only thing that matters," he said.

He kissed her mouth twice; drew her warm head to his breast; touched her face with his lips, very gently,—her clustered curls; and she looked back at him out of eyes in which light trembled.

If her soft, cool lips remained unresponsive, at least they did not avoid his, nor did her cool body drawn close, closely imprisoned.

After a long while, against him, he was aware of her heart, hurrying. In the first flash of boyish passion he crushed her in his arms and felt her breath and lips suddenly hot against his.

Then, in the instant, she had disengaged herself violently and had stepped clear of him, scarlet and silent. Nor spoke until he followed and she had avoided him again.

"Don't—do that," she said unsteadily. . . . "You—hurt me."

"Eris! I love you——"

"Don't say that. . . . I don't like it. . . . I don't *like* it," she repeated breathlessly.

A silence—confusion of hurrying atoms of time—a faint flash from chaos.

"Can't you care for me, Eris?" he whispered.

She turned on him, pale, controlled: "I don't like what you did, I tell you! . . . And that's *that*!"

For a long while they stood there, unstirring.

"Do you dismiss me?" he asked at last.

She made no reply.

“Had you rather that I should go, Eris?”

“Yes.”

“Why?” he asked, like a whipped boy.

“Because I am tired of you,” she said evenly.

He stepped to the corridor, took his hat and stick, but lingered, all hot with the rebuff, despising himself for lingering. He laid his hand on the door knob, miserably hoping, miserable in his self-contempt.

“Eris!”

She did not even turn her head.

He left the hall door open, still miserably hoping, scorning himself, but lagging on the stairs. As he reached the street door he heard her close her own with a crash and bolt it.

It was after midnight,—and after she had finished crying,—that the girl began to undress.

Once she thought she heard him return,—thought she heard his voice at her door, calling her; and her eyes flamed.

But on her pillow she began to cry again, soundlessly, one arm flung across her face.

Eris, daughter of Discord. . . .

CHAPTER XXII

COLTFOOT had a short note from Annan asking him to lunch. He called up, saying that he couldn't get away until afternoon.

When he did arrive at No. 3 Governor's Place, Mrs. Sniffen said that Mr. Annan was lying down—that for the last two weeks he had not seemed to be very well.

"What's wrong with him?" asked Coltfoot.

"I don't know, sir. 'E doesn't go out any more. 'E 'asn't left the 'ouse in the last fortnight."

"That's nothing. He's working."

"No, sir; Mr. Annan don't write. He just reads or sits quiet like till a fit takes 'im sudden, and then he walks and walks and walks."

"Does he eat?"

"Nothing to keep a canary 'ealthy. It's 'igh-balls what keep 'im up, Mr. Coltfoot; and I 'ate to say so, but it worrits me."

"Mr. Annan doesn't drink," said Coltfoot incredulously.

"Oh, no, sir—a glass of claret at dinner—a cocktail perhaps. It's only the last two weeks that I 'ave to keep 'im in ice and siphons."

Coltfoot, puzzled, thought a moment: "All right," he said, "I'll go up."

Annan, lying on the lounge, heard him and sat up.

They shook hands; Annan pushed the Irish whiskey toward him and pointed to the ice and mineral water.

"Mike," he said, "is my stuff rotten?"

Coltfoot, who had been inspecting his thin features, laughed.

"Not so rotten," he said. "Why?"

"You once said it was all wrong."

"Probably professional jealousy, Barry——" He constructed an iced draught for himself, sipped it, furtively noticing the bluish shadows on Annan's temples and under his cheek bones.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

"Nothing. . . . I'm worried because I can't write."

"Rot, my son."

"It's quite true. I haven't touched a pen for a month, nearly. . . . The hell of it is that I've nothing to say."

There was a silence.

"Good God, Mike," he burst out, "do you think I'm done for?"

"I think not," drawled the other.

"Because—I can't work. I *can't*. I seem to be in a sort of nightmare state of mind. . . . Did you ever feel that the world's askew and everything out of proportion?"

"No, I never did. Something has happened to you, Barry."

"Nothing—important. . . . No. . . . But I'm rather scared about my work. You know those stories I did for you? I hate them!"

"You ungrateful young devil, they made you."

"*What* did they make me?"

"A best seller—for one item. A fine workman for another——"

"Mike! Who cares for good workmanship in these days? Who understands it when he sees it? Who does it?"

"It's a jerry-age,—jerry-built houses, furniture, machinery,—jerry-built literature, music, drama,—jerry-built nations too,—and marriages and children and every damned thing that once required good workmanship.

"Now, everything is glue and pasteboard and unskilled labour——"

"Oh, lay off on your jerry-built jeremiad!" cried Coltfoot, laughing. "Where do you get that stuff?"

"Stuff is right, too. I'm a fake, also. I'm a jerry-built author with a jerry-built education and I write jerry-bui——" He dodged a lump of ice.

"Shut up," said Coltfoot wearily. "How long do you think I'm going to listen? Come on, now, what's started you skidding, Barry?"

"You started me."

"Oh—that line of talk I handed you?"

"It got under my skin."

"Oh! Who's been sticking the knife into you since? Not your fool public. Not the Great American Ass."

Annan shook his head.

"Well, who?"

"Another—friend."

"Is that what upset you?"

"Yes. . . . Partly."

"You're not ill, are you, Barry?" inquired the elder man, curiously.

"No, I should say not!"

"Financial troubles? . . . You don't mind my asking?"

"Oh, it isn't anything of that sort, Mike. . . . It really isn't anything."

"You're not—in love. . . . Are you?"

"Hang it all, no, I'm not! . . . No. . . . I've never been in love, Mike."

"You've had a few affairs, dear friend," remarked Coltfoot, amused.

"Well, you know the kind. Everybody has 'em. Everybody has that sort. That's just vanity—silliness—no harm, you know. . . . The young are always sparring—like little chicks and kittens."

Coltfoot finished his glass. There was an interval; Annan set both elbows on his knees and framed his drawn face between his hands.

"No, I'm not in love," he said as though to himself.

They discussed other matters. But now and then Annan drifted back to love, and his ignorance of it.

"I suppose," he said carelessly, "a fellow is able to diagnose the thing if he gets it. . . . Recognise it. . . . Don't you?"

"Probably."

"I suppose every fellow stands a chance of landing there sooner or later."

"You write about it. Don't you know?"

"Certainly. . . . I'm familiar with some phases of it. . . . The phenomena are well known."

"The various sorts of love and its aftermath that you write about are enough to scare any man off that stuff," remarked Coltfoot.

"Those are the sorts I've seen. . . . Or the cut and dried hypocrisy of my own kind and kindred. . . . I've seen darned few cases of satisfactory and enduring love. . . . Darned few, Mike."

"Then there are a few?"

"Sure."

"Why not write about one such incident?"

After a silence Annan lifted his eyes and gave him a haggard look.

"I'm afraid of Christmas-card stuff, I guess. . . . Mike, I've always been afraid of it. I've had a morbid fear of weakness. . . . And do you know I believe *that* was the real weakness? *I am weak!*"

"Barry, you've merely had things come to you too easily. You've had your own way too much. You're persuasive; you get it. You've been, perhaps, a little self-complacent, a bit smug, a trifle cocksure. . . . All strength is in danger of such phases. But weakness never is. Weakness *must* assert itself or silently acquiesce in its own visible inferiority. For the bragger is the weakling, not he who does not need to assert himself."

"And always there lies a danger in the reticence of strength that, unawares, complacency and self-satisfaction may taint it, and strength go stale."

After a silence: "My stuff has been pretty narrow, I guess," muttered Annan.

"Narrow calibre, perhaps; but powerful. You can shoot a bigger gun and bigger projectile, Barry. I don't know what your limits may be, but I know they're wide—if you care to range them."

"That's nice of you, Mike. . . . I guess I'll feel like working . . . pretty soon. . . . As for falling in love, . . . I suppose I'll know it if I do. . . . Don't you think so?"

Coltfoot took his hat and stick:

"I'm not sure. I don't believe the thing conforms always to specific gravity or Troy weight or carats or decimals. I don't believe that a standard test will always give the same reaction." He scowled: "I don't believe there's such a thing as love in elemental supply. I think it's always found in combination—endless combinations. . . . And how the hell you're to recognise it, candidly, I don't know."

"Stay to dinner; will you, Mike?"

"Sorry. . . . By the way, how is your little waif, the Goddess of Discord, getting on with Smull?"

"All right, I fancy."

"Don't you see her?"

"I haven't lately."

"Well, the gossip is that she's sure fire. Frank Donnell believes in her. I've heard that Smull is crazy about her and stands to back her to the limit. . . . I'm sorry—rather."

"About what?" asked Annan sharply.

"Well, in Frank Donnell she had a gentleman. But Creevy is a vulgar fellow. His staff isn't so much, either. Too bad the little girl couldn't have remained in Betsy Blythe's company. It was a decent bunch."

"Isn't hers?"

"Oh—I guess it's endurable. . . . Creevy is a rat. So's Emil Shunk. Marc Blither and Harry Quiss are just common and harmless. . . . Of course, if anybody offends your little protégée Albert Smull will do murder."

"You don't like Smull," said Annan.

"Neither do you."

When Coltfoot had gone Annan went to the telephone. And sat there for an hour without calling anybody. He had done this every day for two weeks. Sometimes he did it several times a day.

Mrs. Sniffen knocked and asked him what he wished for dinner.

"I don't know," he said absently.

She stood waiting for a while: "Will you ring, sir, when you decide?"

"Yes, I will, Xantippe. . . . Thank you."

After she had been gone for some time: "Well," he breathed, "I—I can't call her and keep any self-respect. . . . I simply can't do it. . . . She's through with me anyway. . . . I suppose I acted like a cad. . . . She wasn't the girl to understand such affairs. . . . She is better than such things. . . . Or too stupid for them. . . . Stupid in that way only. . . . Too damned serious. . . . My God, what a hiding she gave me for my book! . . . But the other was worse. . . . I haven't any self-respect when I remember that. . . . If I call her now, she can't take any more away from me, as she's got all I had. . . ."

He came back to the telephone. He could feel the painful colour hot in his face as he unhooked the receiver.

In a hard voice he called her number.

"Now," he said with an oath, "she can do her damnedest!"
She did.

CHAPTER XXIII

HATTIE'S voice answered him: "Who is it, please?"

"Mr. Annan. Is Miss Odell at home?"

"I'll enquiah, suh. Please to hold the wiah."

He could hear her fat feet clattering away along the corridor. An endless, endless wait, almost a quarter of a minute. Steps again on the tiled corridor,—not Hattie's; then the composed voice of Eris:

"Mr. Annan?"

"Yes. . . . Do you—are you quite all right?" he faltered.

"Quite, thank you. Are you?"

"Yes, I'm fine. . . . I'm so glad you're all right. . . . Do you mind my calling up?"

"I hoped you would," she replied calmly.

"D-did you?—really?" he stammered, unable to believe his ears.

"Naturally. I've wondered whether you have been too busy to call me. Have you?"

"Not exactly—busy. Do you—suppose I—I could see you, Eris?"

"Did you suppose you couldn't?" she asked in a low voice.

"I didn't know. . . . When may I?"

"Probably," she said, "you have an engagement this evening—"

"No! I'm not doing anything at all!"

"Then—will you come?"

"Yes. What time?"

"Any time."

"Do you—do you mean *now*?" he cried, enchanted.

Her reply was slightly indistinct: "Yes, as soon as you possibly can—if you would be—so kind—"

Again the low hanging sun at the western end of Jane Street, cherry-red in the river mist, washing out all shabbiness and squalor in a rosy bath of light.

A barrel-organ, played by an old, old man, drew legions of ragged children to the pavement in front of her house, where they whirled like gnats at sunset, dancing to some forgotten rag—the sun spinning its nimbus around each dishevelled, childish head.

Annan made his way through the milling swarm with a caress for those who stumbled across his path and a silver-piece tossed to the ancient where he leaned on his organ, bent almost double, tears perpetual in his sunken eyes.

He ran up the stairs; knocked.

"Hello, Hattie," he tried to say—scarcely conscious of voice at all, or sight or hearing.

"Go right in, Mr. Annan, suh—"

He was already going, not knowing any longer what he was about. The sun-glare on the windows dazzled him a moment before he saw her.

She was standing at the further end of the room. He went slowly toward her, not knowing how they were to meet after ages of dead days.

Then, still knowing nothing, he took her into his arms.

Her mouth warmed slightly against his. As his embrace tightened, her hands hovered close to his shoulders, touched them, crept upward.

Suddenly the girl strained him to her with all her strength.

In the silence of passionate possession, her lips melted to his, . . . a moment, . . . then her head dropped on his arm with a sob.

"I was lonely;—you made me feel lonely. . . . Where have you been?"

"I've been in love with you——"

She released herself but clung to his hand. They came together again, sank down on the lounge together.

"I've been lonely," she repeated; "—it's been deathly lonely without you. . . . I'm tired—of the pain of it. . . ."

Dusk in the room turned golden with a rosy tinge. They had not spoken. His gaze never left her face. At intervals she rested her bobbed head against him, confused by the dire ruin that once had been her mind before love burst in, disordering everything.

Now, groping for the origin of the cataclysm, she retraced her progress through a maze of memories to the first step. The Park! Vision of hot stars overhead; vision of the great bed where she lay in this man's house; vision of the Coast—a confusion of sunshine and feverish endeavour;—but in none of these was the germ of The Beginning. . . . Yet she was drawing nearer now. The place of the birth of love was not far away. . . . Suddenly she found it.

And, as this man now was to know everything that she knew, Eris prepared to bare her untried heart. . . . She offered her lips first; looked into his eyes with a vague and virgin curiosity.

"—And after you went out," she continued, "what had happened seemed suddenly to demoralise me. I was exasperated. . . . I tore your rose from my belt and threw it after you. . . . I slammed the door and bolted it. . . . As though I could bolt out what had happened to me!" She laughed and looked happily into his eyes,—"Barry! As though I could bolt it out!"

He kissed her hands; her lips caressed his bent head.

" . . . And, do you know," she went on, "I even swore at you?"

"Swore at——" Laughter checked him.

"Yes, I damned you. I knew how to. They swear hard

on farms. . . . Oh, Barry, I swore at you like a hired man!"

"You dear," he said, "—you dear!"

"You say that now, but you nearly drove me mad that evening. . . . You *did*!"

"I was half crazy myself, Eris——"

"Were you!" she pleaded with swift tenderness. "Oh, Barry, you are *thin*! You look *ill*. I was frightened when you came in this evening——"

She drew his head to her again, caressed it, tender, penitent:

"You are *not* well. Can I do anything?"

"You are doing it."

"I know. . . . I wish I could take care of you——"

"You're going to feed me, presently."

"You make a joke of it; but you're *ill*, and I did it!"

"Blessed child, I'll be so fat in a week that I'll waddle like Hattie!"

"Show me," she urged, enchanted.

He got up and tried to waddle, and she sank back, convulsed.

In fact, they both had become rather light headed by the time Hattie announced dinner.

It was love's April—gusty with unbidden gaiety—with heavenly intervals of calm; of caprice; of stormy contact; of smiles, tremulous, close to tears—lips touching in wonder; and the sudden breeze of laughter freshening, refreshing mind and body:—their April in Love after youth's long winter.

"Poor boy," she said, "I've rather a horrid dinner for you. I was dining out, and you didn't give me time——"

"You broke a dinner engagement for me, Eris?"

"I telephoned Nancy Cassell that I couldn't come. It doesn't matter. . . . Anyway, that's why you're having omelette and minced chicken. . . ."

Now and then she slipped her cool, smooth hand into his

under the camouflage of the cloth. And she ate so, sometimes awkwardly; and clung a little to his hand when he would have released hers.

Once she drew a deep, uneven breath: "I never expected to be in love," she said. "Oh, Barry, it's so inconvenient!"

"How?" he protested.

"My *dear!* I work like the dickens! It would be all right if I could come back to you at night. But this way—"

After a silence: "That must happen, too, Eris."

"I'll have to talk to you about that. . . . And there are evenings when I must study—rehearse before the mirror—or read very hard. And some evenings I am dead tired. . . . And then there are dinners. . . . And one's friends. . . . Darling!—you look at me so oddly!"

"Well—as I'm in love with you, I'd rather like to see you more than twice a year—"

She laughed and caught his hands—set her lips to them—looked up at him again with her heart in her eyes.

"To be loved by *you!*" she said, "is too wonderful for me!"

"Once," he reminded her with malice, "you told me you were tired of me—"

Her shocked face checked him.

"I was only joking, Eris—"

"I *did* say it! And I was already in love with you when I said it. God and you punished me instantly. But I couldn't ever bear to have you two do it again—"

Somebody had sent her some cordials,—mint, curaçoa,—that sort. She was unaccustomed—had no taste for such things. But she was happy to show him her sideboard after dinner.

"It's all for you. You like such things, don't you? Well, then, I'm going to keep them for you. . . . Rosalind goes schmoozing about when she comes here. Other girls,

also. But I've been unutterably mean—and I've hoarded it for you."

"Then you *did* expect me to call you up?" he asked, laughingly.

"Oh, Lord, I didn't know. If you hadn't called me I couldn't have stood it much longer."

"Would you have called me?"

"Of course. . . . Or died."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"I was afraid. . . . And I wasn't quite dead, yet——"

"Of what were you afraid?"

"I knew you must be very bored with me. . . . And there was something else. . . . It scared me. . . . It still exists."

"Tell me, Eris."

"Yes; I'll have to tell you, now." They rose from the table and she took his arm. . . . "But you *must* love me, Barry!—I've got to be loved by you now."

In the lamp-lit sitting room he drew her to him: "How could I help loving you, Eris?"

"I don't want you to help it."

"I couldn't, anyway. So you needn't fear to tell me anything you please."

"No. . . . I've got to tell you, whether it scares me or not. . . . I think I'd rather wait until just before you go."

She curled up on the sofa close to him, one hand clasping her ankles, the other against his shoulder.

"Also, I want to explain to you," she said, "that I didn't know Mrs. Grandcourt was your aunt until *after* I'd fallen in love with you."

"I don't follow the continuity——"

"I mean I'm not socially ambitious."

He was still mystified.

"I didn't know you were so very important socially," she explained.

"I'm not. My aunt thinks she is, but really she isn't any more. Life passed her on the road at eighty with every cylinder hitting. I never travelled that highway. But my poor aunt still trundles along it in an ancient victoria. Even the flivvers cover her old-mine diamonds with plebeian joy-dust——"

Eris, helpless with laughter, clung to his shoulder.

"I don't wish to laugh," she protested. "Your aunt is nice to me. . . . Though rather horrid to Betsy. . . . It seems she knew my grandmother. She says she told you that."

"When did she admit to you that my relationship disgraced her?"

"Yesterday."

"Oh, so you continue to see her in town?"

"I lunched with her."

"In her private morgue?"

"It is gloomy."

"I suppose, while she was about it, she handed you a lurid line or two regarding me."

"Well—yes. . . . I am instructed to beware of you. . . . Darling!"

"Are you going to beware of me?"

"No."

He kissed her threateningly: "What do you suppose my aunt would think if she knew you had once been my guest over night?"

"I told her."

"What!" he exclaimed.

"But, Barry, I couldn't allow her to be so friendly unless she understood what sort of girl I am."

"You didn't tell her about the Park, also?"

"I did."

"How did she take it?"

"She said such severe things about you—I was quite annoyed! . . . Dreadful things, darling——"

"About *me*?"

"Yes. She called you several ghastly names——"

"Which?"

"Well—'libertine'."

He roared with laughter but Eris had turned rosy.

"I told her very plainly that you were *not*," she said.
"I told her you were kind and generous and harmless——"

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, helpless with laughter again.

"What are you laughing at? You *are* harmless!" she repeated. "Aren't you?"

"Yes, darling. . . . But some encomiums hurt as well as edify. . . . Never mind. Go on."

"That was all. . . . Except she tried to persuade me to give up my profession. She always does."

"What does she graciously suggest for you?"

"Why, I suppose she wishes to be kind to me because she was very fond of my grandmother. . . . But I couldn't go and live with her."

"She asked you?"

Eris nodded.

"My aunt," he said good humouredly, "is very rich and very stingy. You're the only person I ever heard of on whom she was ready to spend real money. What did she propose?"

"Adoption, I believe."

"Lord! She really must have cared for your grandmother. . . ."

"I think she really did."

After a silence: "You declined?"

"Darling! Do you think such things count with me?"

After a silence: "Did you tell her I'd ever kissed you?" he asked curiously.

"*That* was none of her business, Barry."

He laughed: "So you pass up the wealthy aunt for the libertine nephew? Do you?"

"I do. I like him. In fact, I'm rather in the way of

loving him. Also, I love liberty, and freedom to pursue happiness. Happiness means work, and you."

"Which comes first, work or me?"

"Darling!"

"Which?"

"I don't have to make that choice——"

"Suppose you had to?" he insisted.

"I'd be fearfully unhappy——"

"But you'd choose work. . . . Would you, Eris?"

"I—suppose so. . . . Probably I'd die in either case. . . . Work means life. . . . I guess you do, too. But if I had to choose I'd choose work, I suppose."

Nothing ever had touched him so deeply; nor had so profoundly surprised him.

He said: "Every word I ever have heard you utter merely reveals new beauty in you,—and my own heart, more and more in love with you."

He drew her close to his breast; spoke with his lips on her cheek:

"Would marrying me hamper you? . . . Had you rather wait until you are more secure in your profession?"

"Darling!" she said pitifully, "—that is what I had to tell you. I *am* married."

He stared at her astounded.

After a tense silence: "Please love me—Barry——" she whispered. "Please, dear!"

She clasped her hands in appeal, as unconscious of drama as she had been that day on Whitewater Brook when Mr. Quiss threatened to swim out of her ken.

"Barry! Are you disgusted?"

"Why, it seems so impossible——"

"To love me?"

"No!—that you—you ever have been married!"

"I haven't been—entirely. . . . Only legally. . . . and partly."

He thought: "My God, there seems to be something the matter with everybody and everything." And to Eris: "Why didn't you ever tell me?"

"It was none of your business until I fell in love with you, was it?"

He caught her in his arms, roughly: "It's my business now. Do you understand? I'll never give you up. . . . Look at me, Eris!"

He was hurting her; and she smiled and endured her bruises, breast and lips and limb.

She said: "If you marry me I shall have to get unmarried first—somehow or other——"

"Where is—this man?"

"I don't know, darling. . . . This was how it all occurred——"

Now, sullenly, and in silence he listened to the sordid story of the marriage of Eris.

She told it without resentment—and with the candour and brevity of a child.

Always it had seemed to her as though she had been merely a witness of the miserable affair and not personally concerned. And she told it in that manner.

"You see, it really doesn't count," she concluded. "I was so ignorant that it meant nothing to me at the time. I scarcely ever think of it, now. Barry. . . . I *want* you to love me. . . . But if you had rather not marry me——"

He reddened: "What alternative do you suggest?"

"Why—this!—as we are. . . . It leaves us both free to work——"

"*That* is your ruling passion," he said bluntly, "—work!"

"If we don't marry, I can have you, and work, too——"

"Do you think me narrow enough, selfish enough, to interfere with your career if you marry me?"

She answered gravely: "I wasn't afraid of that. . . . I was afraid of—children—if I marry you. . . . dearest."

"But if——" Then the candour of her chaste self-revelation grew clear to him—her exquisite ignorance, her virgin confidence in the heavenly inviolability of love.

"Do you understand, Barry?"

"I think so."

"You see," she explained, "unmarried I can go and still have you. . . . But careers often end when children come."

"Don't you ever want them, Eris?"

"Well—as I've never had any, isn't it natural I should prefer you and a career to you and a baby?"

"I suppose it is."

"Not that I don't care for children," she murmured. Her grey eyes grew remote; a hint of tenderness curved her lips, and she smiled faintly to herself.

"We'll try out your idea first," he said, "—the combination you prefer,—your work first, then me. . . . Our life will pass in one endless courtship."

"Could anything be lovelier!" she cried, enchanted.

CHAPTER XXIV

IF Annan supposed he was to see Eris frequently during those first enchanted days, he presently realised his mistake. She was working under pressure at the studio.

Pressure, due to laziness and ignorance, seldom bears hard on the incompetents who cause it. In this case it was due to hasty organization and Mr. Creevy's direction. And Eris was always about to take a train when Annan called her on the telephone,—always starting "on location," or "working late at the studio," or kept idle awaiting "re-takes."

These phrases began to irritate Annan; but there seemed to be nothing he could do about it.

In New York, theatres were closing for the summer; roofs and beaches opening; synthetic fruit-drinks appeared. June did her pathetic best for the noisy, shabby city in park and square;—put on her prettiest in green leaves and blossoms. The Park Department ruined the effort with red and yellow cannas. God knows whether New York's dull and bovine eyes notice such things at all. Does the ox notice the wild flowers he chews, or the ass admire the thistle blossoms before munching? But why New York is not nauseated by its floral display remains a mystery.

The only dose the aborigine notices is an emetic. But even red and yellow cannas in combination left New York's bowels unaffected.

Still, ailanthus and catalpa in Governor's Place spread once more their cool, green pools of shade over parched sidewalks; ampelopsis on Annan's house and an ancient wistaria

twisted over the iron balcony did their missionary part to touch the encysted hearts of those who 'have eyes but see not.' A white butterfly or two fluttered through Governor's Place.

Annan's house, stripped for summer, was cool and dusky and still, haunted by a starched and female phantom that flitted through the demi-light in eternal quest for moth and dust and rust.

The only inclination of a man really in love is to keep at work in the absence of the beloved. Nothing else helps to slay the intolerable hours and days.

It was thus with this young man. Eris on location was so tragic a calamity that he could endure it only by rushing headlong into the clutch of literature.

All day, in dressing-gown and slippers, pen in hand, he scratched madly at a pad.

Nourishment was set before him at proper intervals; he ate it at improper intervals.

But the pinched look had left his youthful and agreeable features and shadows were gone from cheek and temple.

Every day he wrote a morning and an evening letter to Eris. And no doubt it was her letters to him that were feeding him fat.

Sometimes Coltfoot dropped in to lounge in an arm-chair and smoke his pipe and lazily observe the younger man, *flagrante delicto* with his brazen Muse.

And once Rosalind coolly invaded his threshold, announced with a sniff by the Starched One.

Rosalind wanted a cocktail and lunch. She sat on the edge of Annan's writing table, swinging one trim foot, interrupting breezily when it suited her, or satisfying her capricious curiosity with his inky copy.

"Not so bad," she drawled, shuffling a dozen unnumbered sheets together and tossing them under his nose. "Come on, ducky, and talk to me ere we feast and revel."

"I'm going to give you your lunch when it's ready. Until then I want to work. Run away and play, Linda——"

"Play nothing! We're closed for the summer. Mom's gone to the mountains and I'm queen of the flat. I sleep most of the time. Lay off, ducky, and converse with your little lonely Linda——"

"Wait a second, will you——" he protested. "Let my papers alone——"

"No, not a second will I wait—not a heart-throb! *Re-gardez-moi, beau jeune homme. Ayez pitié de moi——*"

She leaned over, patted his crisp hair, joggled his pen, gave a fillip to his nose.

"Betsy's going to Paris," she said. "What do you think of that?"

"Why don't you go too?"

"You want to get rid of me? You can't. By the way, how's your solemn friend, Mr. Coltfoot?"

"All right," he murmured, scratching away on his copy.

"And Eris? Do you ever see her, Barry?"

"Now and then."

"Is it all over?"

"What?"

"Your affair with her——"

"Can it, Rosalind!——"

"*You're* the canner, my fickle friend. We're all pickles and you jarred us. . . . Sour pickles. . . . When you're through with a girl she's a schmeer."

"Look at me! I'm a schmeer. I was innocent and happy till you came schmoozing. . . . You know what I hear about Eris?"

No answer.

"Albert Smull is crazy about her. . . . He's married, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"They're the fancy devils, aren't they?—those red-necked, ruddy-jowled, hand-groomed Wall Street Romeos. But

there's just a vulgar suspicion of the natty and jaunty about them;—and their chins are always shaved blue——”

“Confound it——” he exclaimed, “can't you let me finish this page?”

“Don't you like gossip, ducky?” she inquired with a baby stare.

He lay back in his chair while a scowl struggled with an unwilling smile.

“His Greatness,” she said, “looks hungry. When do we trifle with rare wines and sparkling fruits? Oh—and that reminds me, I want to tell you about a suitor—you know him—Wilkes Bruce, the painter . . . just to show you how a man sometimes cans himself. There are two words that all fakes love to hand a girl.

“He was making a hit with me at the Ritz, and I was showing him that scarab ring you tell me is phony; and he suddenly said those two words—said 'em both in one breath!—‘*Indubitably*,’ says he, ‘this is a *veritable* antique!’ The *two* words! . . . I'm off that schmeer,” she added.

Annan wanted to yawn but stifled the indiscretion.

“You know,” she drawled, “I'm sorry for Eris.”

“Why?”

“Well, she has picked a bum in Ratford Creevy, and in that Dutch souse, Emil Shunk. It isn't agreeable to work with such people. . . . And I fancy Smull is beginning to bother her, too.”

A slight colour stained Annan's temples: “Why do you fancy that?”

“Oh, I don't know. One notices and hears. He's always on her heels, always schmoozing around. Of course there's gossip, there always is. But that's the kind of man Smull is. . . . And there you are.”

“Is he—that kind?”

“Well, he tried it on Betsy. Imagine! *On Betsy*, my dear!”

“What happened?”

"Why, she told him to go to the devil. And he backing her! Can you imagine?"

"I hope I can."

"They're mostly that sort, ducky—Jews and Gentiles. . . . It's a good thing I have Mom. All I have to do is whistle her. Run? It would surprise you."

Luncheon was announced.

He nodded, absently. . . . He was rather silent during luncheon. But Rosalind departed rather pleased with herself.

That night, writing to Eris, he said: "If ever anything disagreeable happens to annoy you, I want you to come to me with it immediately."

Commenting on this, from the Berkshires: "Everything is gay and nothing is disagreeable. Mr. Smull came up and we had a picnic near Williamstown—the jolliest party!—except that Mr. Shunk had been drinking and Mr. Creevy's jokes were rather vulgar. But a girl becomes impervious to such details. Only—I miss Frank Donnell and the nice, clean people in Betsy's company. . . ."

That was all. And Annan, relieved, yet always vaguely uneasy, went on with his brand new story—scratched away at it, biding the return of Eris.

She came when the month was nearly gone, warning him by wire of her train, evidently not expecting him to meet it, for she asked him to come to Jane Street for dinner at seven.

He never had gone to the train to meet Eris,—had never even thought of doing it. He thought of it now and wondered why he never before had done so.

By telephone he ordered flowers to be sent to Jane Street; and, a few minutes before six, he walked into the Grand Central Station and was directed to the exit where the incoming train was already signalled.

Outside the ropes, where people had gathered to welcome arriving friends, Annan encountered Albert Smull, As usual they shook hands. Smull wore his habitual and sanguine smile. His features had grown into it.

"Saw your good aunt at Newport, Friday," he said, "but I seldom see you anywhere these days, Annan."

"I don't go about. How is it at Newport?"

"Fine weather——" Through the open gates the train glided into view. "Thought I'd come down and see how our picture people are looking after their tour on location," said Smull. "You know some of them, Annan—you've met our clever little Eris?"

Annan turned and deliberately looked him over from his ruddy jowls to the polished tan shoes.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I've known Miss Odell for some time. I'm here to meet her."

Smull's sanguine face slowly took on a heavier red but the set smile remained.

"Bright kid," he said, "—getting away with it, Creevy tells me. Shill and I are putting a lot of money into this picture——"

Passengers from the train just arrived were now pouring out of the exit, recognising waiting friends behind the ropes, signalling them with eager gestures, hurrying around the barriers to meet them.

Annan, ignoring Smull, and intently scanning the throng, finally perceived Ratford Creevy and Emil Shunk. Behind them, in the crowd, were other faces slightly familiar—members of the cast—and suddenly he saw Eris in a turquoise blue toque and summer gown, carrying her satchel,—a lithe, buoyant figure, moving quickly through the gates followed by a red-cap with her luggage.

Smull, perhaps not caring to bend too much at the waist, went around the rope; Annan stooped under it.

"Barry!" she exclaimed in happy surprise.

"It's been a thousand years," he said. "I've a taxi here——"

Smull, smiling eagerly out of dark eyes set a trifle too closely, and carrying his straw hat in his hand, confronted them.

"How do you do, Mr. Smull," said Eris gaily, withdrawing her gloved hand from Annan's and offering it to Smull.

"You're looking fine, Eris," he said, with too cordial familiarity. "I just passed Creevy and he says everything went big. Glad you're back, little lady. I've a car here——"

"Thank you, Mr. Smull——"

The girl turned to Annan: "Mr. Smull wired me that he'd meet our train. . . . So thank *you*, too—for asking me. . . . I'm so sorry you have troubled to keep a taxi waiting for me——"

Smull, always smiling, turned to Annan: "Can't we drop you somewhere, old chap?"

Annan said: "Thanks, no." And, looking at Eris with cool curiosity, he took off his hat.

"I'm so glad you're back," he said. "I hope I may see you while you're here. Good-night."

"Good-night," she replied, as though slightly confused.

Annan bowed pleasantly, including them both, and turned to the left along the rope. The girl went rather slowly away beside Smull, followed by the red-cap with her luggage.

Outside the station, on the ramp above, Annan found his taxi and got into it. All the way home he stared persistently at the chauffeur's frowsy head; but, whatever his thoughts, nothing on his smoothly composed features betrayed them.

As he entered his house the telephone was ringing, and he went to the lower one in the butler's pantry.

"Barry!"

"Yes."

"Are you coming to dinner?"

"I had expected to."

"Could you come *now*?"

"Where are you?"

"Why, at home, of course."

"Alone?"

"Alone!—" she repeated. "Why, yes, of course I am alone. I said seven, but I want you now. I can't wait. Do you mind?"

"All right," he said drily. At such moments, in most young men in love, the asinine instinct dominates.

Still chilled by the unpleasant impression of an intimacy, the natural existence of which he had never thought about, he went to his room and got into a dinner jacket, sulkily.

As he was dressing it occurred to him that this was one sample of the sort of thing he was very likely to encounter. A rush of boyish jealousy and resentment flushed his face—irritation that the world should entertain any doubt as to his proprietary right in this girl.

It was high time that the world made no mistake about it. Men of Albert Smull's sort had better understand what was his status vis-à-vis with Eris.

Intensely annoyed—and without any reason, as he realised—he went out in a characteristically masculine frame of mind, hailed a disreputable taxi on Greenwich Avenue, and drove to Jane Street.

The declining sun, not yet low enough to transmute its ugliness to terms Turneresque, searched out every atom of shabbiness and squalor in the humble street. And it all added to his sullen dissatisfaction.

"One thing," he muttered; "—she's got to get out of this dirty district. It's no place for the girl I'm going to marry."

Fat Hattie admitted him, simpering her welcome:

"Yuh flowers done come, Mistuh Annan. They's just grand, suh. Miss Eris she's taking a bath. She says foh you to go into the settin' room, Mistuh Annan. Might I offah yuh the hospitality of some Sherry wine, Mistuh Annan?"

He declined and went in; stood looking around at the plain, familiar place, brightened only by his flowers.

"Another thing," he thought irritably, "—this installment-plan furniture has got to go. She doesn't seem to know what nice things look like. . . . She hasn't any comforts in her bed-room, either. This third-rate existence has got to stop."

Unreasonably glum he picked up the evening paper, unfolded it, stood holding it; but his gaze rested on her closed door. Then, even as he gazed, it opened and the girl herself came out in a soft wool robe and slippers, her chestnut hair in lovely disorder.

"Darling!" she said with the breathless smile he knew so well. "I just couldn't wait. I was so afraid you were annoyed with me—"

His kiss made her eager explanation incoherent; she nestled to him, dumb, happy in the physical reunion, wistful for the spiritual, seeking it in his face with questioning grey eyes.

"It mustn't happen again," he said. "You're mine, Eris, and people have got to understand."

"Darling! Of course I am. But I don't quite see how people are going to understand—"

"We'll talk about that this evening."

"All right. . . . Darling, I must dress. Oh, Barry, I'm so glad—I'm always lonely without you, wherever I go!"

One long, deep embrace—her swift ardour leaving him trembling—and before he knew it her door had slammed behind her.

From within her bed-room: "Your letters have been so wonderful, Barry darling! They made work delightful." . . . The excited clatter and rustle of a girl in a hurry came indistinctly through the closed door. . . . "It's a peach of a part, Barry. There are real brains in it. . . . I wish I had Frank Donnell to *tell* me—"

"Can't Creevy do that?"

"I don't know. . . . He isn't a drill-master. . . . Sometimes I'm afraid he doesn't know.

"It's a helpless feeling, Barry. I trusted Frank. I knew I could lean on him. But Mr. Creevy——"

"I haven't much use for Creevy, either," he said bluntly.

She opened the door. He found her seated before her little mirror, tucking up stray crisp curls. She wore a mauve dinner gown—a scant affair—as though her supple, milk-white body were lightly sheathed in orchid petals.

She stretched back her head to him where he stood behind her; he kissed her soft lips, her throat. Leaning so, against him, she looked back again at her fresh young beauty in the mirror.

"That year with Frank Donnell," she murmured, "is saving my very skin, now. I *don't* know enough to go ahead without a strong, friendly power reassuring, leading me. Mr. Creevy lets me go my own way, or loses his temper and shouts at me."

"He's rather a cheap individual," remarked Annan.

"He's always shouting at us. . . . And I haven't much confidence in Emil Shunk, either. . . . Oh, how I long for Frank, and for that nice, kind camera-man, Stoll! To work with gentlemen means so much to a girl."

"It means that she can do her best work," said Annan. "In other words, it's bad business to employ a pair of vulgarians like Ratford Creevy and Emil Shunk to direct decent people in a decent picture."

"I seem to have no point of contact with them," she admitted. "Betsy's company was so respectable,—and even the Crystal Films people were so decent to me that I didn't expect to encounter film folk as common and horrid as I have met. . . . And the Jews are no worse than the Gentiles, Barry."

"Gentile or Jew," he said, "—who cares in these days how an educated gentleman worships God? But a Christian blackguard or a Jewish blackguard, there's the pair that are

ruining pictures, Eris. Whether they finance a picture, direct it, release it, exhibit it, or act in it, these two vermin are likely to do it to death.

"Your profession is crawling with them. It needs de-lousing. It's all squirming with parasites. They carry moral leprosy. They poison audiences. Some day the public will kill them."

Eris stood up and linked her arms in Annan's: "It's so stupid," she said "—a wonderful art—and only in its infancy—and already almost monopolised by beastly people. . . . Well, there *are* men like Frank Donnell. . . . And, as for the rest of us—as far as I can judge the vast majority among us appreciate decency and have every inclination toward it. . . . I don't know a woman in my profession who leads an irregular life from choice."

"It's that or quit, sometimes, I suppose," he said gravely.

"I've heard so. . . . Before I knew anything I used to hold such a girl in contempt, Barry. I know better, now."

"With all your passion for learning," he said, "did you ever suppose there was such sorry wisdom to acquire?"

"Oh, yes. I guessed, vaguely. One can't live in a little village without guessing some things. . . . Or on a farm without guessing the rest. . . . It's best to know, always. . . . Lies shock me; but, do you know, truth never did. Truth has frightened me, disgusted, angered, saddened me. But it never shocked me yet. . . . I'm afraid you think me hardened—"

His arm drew her and she turned swiftly to his lips—in full view of Hattie in the dining-room beyond.

"I don't care," whispered Eris, her cheeks scarlet, "—she ought to guess what we are to each other by this time."

As he seated her he said: "If she does know she knows more than I do, Eris. . . . *What* are we to each other?"

He took his chair and she laughed at him.

"I'm serious," he repeated. "*What* are we to each other?"

"Darling! Are you trying to be funny?"

"Not a bit. Please answer me, Eris."

"Ridiculum!"

"Answer me!"

"Why—why, you goose, we are in love with each other. Isn't that the answer?"

"Are you engaged to me?"

"*Darling!*—"

"Are you?"

"Why—no."

"Why not?"

"You know one reason, anyway."

"You mean that fellow," he said with a shrug.

"Yes, of course."

They remained rather silent for a while. Presently he said:

"Merely to be in love with each other doesn't place either of us definitely."

"Place us?" she repeated, perplexed. "It places us with each other, doesn't it?"

"But not with the world."

She considered this while covers were removed and another course laid.

"Darling, do you mind carving that chicken? If you don't want to, Hattie can take it to the kitchen—"

"Watch me," he boasted, impaling the tender, roasted bird and shaving a smoking slice from its sternum.

"Wonderful," she murmured, clasping her snowy fingers; "he knows everything, does everything. And he asks me where it places him! . . . It places you, darling, like a god, under lock and key inside the secret shrine of my innermost heart."

"No," he said, "that temple is already reserved. It's occupied by the real and only god you worship. . . . The god of Work!"

After a moment she raised her eyes, tenderly apprehensive:

"I do love you, Barry."

"But you *worship* the other one. . . . You can't serve two gods."

"I worship you, too, whatever you say!"

"I'm a minor deity compared to the great god Work."

"Darling—don't speak that way—even in jest——"

"I want a shrine for myself. I won't interfere with the other god——"

"—When I tell you you're the only man in the world!——"

"I want you to engage yourself to me. You can take your time about marrying me if you're afraid it will spoil your career. But I want the world to know we're engaged."

"Why, dear?" she asked in uneasy surprise.

"Because that will place us both, definitely."

"Goodness," she murmured uncertainly, "I didn't suppose that falling in love was so complicated. . . . Darling! I haven't time to—to find out how to get rid of that man, now; or do it, either——"

"It will have to be done sooner or later," he insisted. "And that's that, as you say."

Until coffee was served they spoke rarely and of other matters.

After coffee, in the living-room, she brought out a packet of stills to show him. They went over them, minutely, consulting, criticising, she explaining every picture and its relation to the continuity.

"You should hear Mr. Creevy bellow, 'Hold it! Hold it! D'ye think I told you to shimmy?' Oh, he is rough, Barry. The first time I heard him bawl out, 'Kill that nigger!' I was terrified: I thought there was going to be a lynching——"

They sat laughing uncontrollably at each other.

"You imitate Creevy's cracked contralto voice," said Annan. "I didn't know you were a mimic, Eris."

"Didn't you?" And she laughed adorably. Then, suddenly, Ratford Creevy's high-pitched, irritated voice came

again from her lips: " 'Everybody! Everybody! Yaas, *you*, too, you poor dumbbell! Get on there. . . . Eris! Eris! My Gawd, where's that amateur! . . . Well, where were you? . . . Well, stand up next time. . . . Lights! . . . Hey, where's that amateur camera-man. . . . Where the hell's Shunk? Emil! Emil!—'"

His laughter and her own cheeked her and she leaned back, the stills sliding from her lap to the floor.

Together they squatted down like two children to gather the litter of scattered photographs, interrupting to touch lips, lightly; and finally he dumped the stills onto a table and drew her to the lounge and gathered her close.

"You know, sweet, the reasonable goal of real love is marriage. Don't you know that?"

"Darling!"

"Isn't it?"

She looked at him uncertainly.

"Isn't it?" he insisted.

"Sometimes."

"Always, ultimately. You realise that, don't you, Eris?"

"Y-es. . . . Ultimately it's the goal. But—"

"You love me enough to marry me, don't you?"

"Now?"

"No, not now. Ultimately."

She said, pitifully: "I love you enough to marry you this moment. . . . But even if I were free you wouldn't ask it, would you, Barry?"

"I don't know." He looked intently at her. "It wouldn't be any use, anyway," he concluded. "Your work is more to you than I am. Isn't it?"

The girl laid her face against his shoulder in silence.

"It's your ruling passion, Eris, isn't it?"

"I—suppose so. . . . But there never can be any other man than you."

"You would make any sacrifice for your work, but you wouldn't sacrifice your work for me, would you, Eris?"

Her head only pressed his shoulder closer.

He said: "You've starved for your work, gone almost in rags, slept in public parks——"

"I'd do these for you. . . . I'll give you anything, do anything for you—except——"

"Except give up your work," he ended drily.

"I couldn't love you if you made me do that," she whispered.

"If I *made* you do it? Do you admit I could make you give it up?" he demanded almost arrogantly.

She shrugged slightly: then raised her head and looked dumbly into his hard eyes.

There are dumb creatures that let themselves be slain without resistance; but in their doomed eyes is something that the slayer never, never can forget.

And, as Annan looked at this girl, something of his masculine egotism and arrogance became troubled.

He said in a more subdued voice: "After you are firmly established in your profession, we can think about marriage, can't we?"

"I always think about it. . . . I often wonder if you can wait."

"I suppose that I must. . . . How long, Eris?"

"I don't know. . . . Darling! I don't know——"

Suddenly she took his head in her arms and kissed him passionately, strained him to her convulsively.

"I don't want you to have a living corpse for a wife," she said tremulously. "That's what I'd be if I stopped work now. I'd be a dead, inert, mindless thing. I couldn't love. Let us go on this way. I must have my freedom. . . . I'll come to you when I'm ready, Barry. . . . There'll come a time when I'll have to have you to go on at all. I'll not be able to work without you. . . . There'll come such a time. . . . Then, if I don't have you, I shall be unable to work at all. . . . Work will stop. I *know* it. . . . If only you will understand. . . ."

It seemed that he did understand. He said he did, anyway. But he also wanted their engagement to be understood. And she promised him to consult his lawyer as soon as work permitted and find out what could be done to eliminate from her life the last traces of Eddie Carter, alias E. Stuart Graydon.

For Eris never expected to lay eyes again upon the nimble Mr. Graydon.

But it is the unexpected that usually happens, particularly if it's disagreeable.

CHAPTER XXV

HER first picture—from a popular novel of the hour called “The Bird of Prey”—was finished and ready for cutting, except for picking up a mass of ragged ends.

Few sets had been knocked down, for there were retakes necessary—accidents due to Shunk or to Creevy, and charged to everybody else from door-keeper to star.

The barn-like studio was in disorder and it rang all day with a hell of dissonance—infernal hammering, trample of heavy feet, the racket of hoarse voices, scrape of props and electric cables over the wood flooring, and the high-pitched, spiteful scolding of Ratford Creevy—as though a noisy mouth could ever remedy confusion resulting from mental incapacity.

Smull came every day to take Eris to lunch—such frequent consultation being both customary and advisable, he informed her.

As a result the girl was a target for gossip and curiosity, sneered at by some, leered at by others, but generally fawned on because of suspected “pull with the main guy.” Courted, flattered, deferred to by one and all, she was inexperienced enough to believe in such universal friendliness, innocent enough to entertain no suspicion of these less-fortunates who were kind to her; of Albert Smull’s unvarying and eager cordiality.

The girl was radiantly happy, despite misgivings regarding Mr. Creevy.

And, as far as that gentleman’s incompetence was concerned, although she did not know it she was learning a

courage and self-reliance that had been slower coming if she had remained under the direction of Frank Donnell.

Artistically, intellectually, Eris, from sheer necessity, had made, unconsciously, a vast advance amid obstacles and conditions that always worried and sometimes dismayed her.

As a matter of fact she had taught more to Creevy than he had ever taught anybody.

Like a good field-dog, the bird-sense and instinct being there, with a little training she had begun to instruct her instructor in qualities and in technique entirely unfamiliar yet astonishingly sound.

A mean mind accepts but resents. Creevy said to Smull, with sufficient cunning to insure further employment:

"She takes her head and wears me out. Full of pep but don't know anything. All the same, I'd rather handle that kind. If you want me to go on with her I'll guarantee her."

But Smull was fretting about the overhead. He had the financier's capacity for detail. He prowled about the studio —when he could take his eager gaze off of Eris—prying, peeping, mousing, snooping, asking misleading questions of employees, gradually informing himself.

He put Creevy on the rack over the books. He told him, always with his fixed and sanguine smile, that the footage was forty per cent. unnecessary. He compared the cost of sets to Frank Donnell's bill; the cost of transportation to the same item in Betsy Blythe's company. Creevy writhed, not daring to show resentment.

But he did worse; he pointed out that Betsy Blythe had a limousine listed on Frank Donnell's account, and that he had cut that out of the perquisites of Eris and substituted a taxi.

Of course Smull knew that. He had connived at this petty economy, but only partly from meanness; for it gave him a better excuse to offer his own car. And he cared nothing about the girl's convenience.

He said to Creevy: "You start in and clean up this pic-

ture by the end of the week. You begin to cut Monday next."

"All right, Mr. Smull. But I better start Marc Blither on the next——"

"What next?"

"The next picture. You have the continuity and director's script——"

"I may give it to Frank Donnell. There may not be another Odell picture," said Smull, smiling fixedly.

Creevy said nothing.

"Usually," added Smull, "I make up my mind at my own convenience and to please myself,—not others."

He got up from the rickety chair, walked to the outer door of the dressing rooms, and sent word to Eris that his car was waiting to take her to luncheon.

She appeared presently without her make-up, Creevy being uncertain that he wanted her during the afternoon, but insisting that she "stick around."

As they went down the steps to the car—a glittering affair with two men on the box—Smull took the girl familiarly by the arm.

"I want to talk over the next picture with you this evening," he said. "I'm asking Frank Donnell to dine with me at my rooms. Will you come?"

She halted at the open door of the car and gave him a surprised and happy look.

"Frank Donnell? I'd love to come. But, Mr. Smull!—you don't mean that Mr. Donnell is to direct *me*!"

"We'll see," he smiled.

"But—Betsy! I *couldn't* do that to *her*!"

Or to anybody, she might have added. But the mere thought of Frank Donnell brought pleasure and gratitude.

"You're so wonderfully kind, Mr. Smull," she said with another radiant look as he aided her to enter the car.

As he got in after her a pallid, shabby man across the

street watched her intently. He seemed interested in Smull, too, and in the shining car, and even in the license number. And he stood looking after it as long as it remained in sight.

That afternoon Eris sat idle in her dressing room, reading, or wandered about among electric cables and lumber and sets while Mr. Creevy tried to fill in and supplement poor directorship with little fiddling retakes.

Emil Shunk, the camera-man, slightly drunk, had turned very sulky. Most of the afternoon was wasted in futile altercation with Creevy, until the latter, exasperated, dismissed everybody.

The taxi allotted to Eris took her back to the city, tired, disgusted, and a little nervous.

The last profane scene between Creevy and Shunk, her all-day idleness, the stifling summer heat in the studio, the jolting drive back to New York through the squalor of the river-front, all these left her tired and depressed.

In her own apartment, bathed, freshened of the city's penetrating grime, and now at her ease in a cool morning wrap, she sipped the tea that Hattie brought and then stretched out on the sofa, thankful to rest body and mind.

For a wonder, Jane Street was quiet that hot afternoon. The blessed stillness healed her ears of the blows of sound; she lay in the pleasant demi-light of lowered shades, disinclined to stir, to speak, to think.

But thinking can be stopped only by sleep. She remembered that she was to call Annan when she got home. Somehow she didn't feel like it.

Lying there, her hands clasped under her chestnut curls, grey eyes widely remote, the idle thoughts went drifting through her mind, undirected, unchecked.

Visions of the past glimmered, went out, followed by others that floated by like phantoms—glimpses of White-water Farms, of her father in his spotless milking-jacket,

of a girl standing with ears stopped and eyes desperately shut while the great herd-bull died.

Tinted spectres of village people she had known rose, slipped away, faded, vanished;—Mazie's three uncouth sons, Si, Willis, and Buddy—all already unreal to her, as though she merely had heard of them;—Dr. Wand, Dr. Benson, Ed. Lister, always redolent of fertilizer;—the minister, "Rev. Stiles";—and then, unbidden, into her mind's vague picture stepped a trim, graceful, polite young man with agreeable voice and long, clever fingers always stained with nicotine or acid—

The girl sat up abruptly; cleared her eyes of tangled curls with a sudden sweep of her slim hand as though to brush away the vision.

As she looked over her left shoulder at the mantle clock her telephone rang.

She sprang up, suddenly aware that she had but a few minutes to dress and go to meet Frank Donnell at the apartment of Albert Smull.

It was Annan on the wire.

"Hello, dearest," she said, stifling the yawn that had been threatening since she aroused herself from her torpor.

"I thought you were to call me when you got home," he said in a dismal voice that sounded rather hollow to her.

"Forgive me, Barry dear. I was rather fagged and I just lay down on the sofa. And I nearly had a nightmare.

... Are you well, darling?"

"I'm seriously ill and—"

"What!" she exclaimed.

"Dying—to see you, Eris."

"You mustn't joke that way; you startle me," she said with a quick breath of relief.

"Would you wear black for me?"

"Please don't make a jest of it—"

"You sweet little thing," he said, "will you dine at my place, or out, or shall I come—"

"Darling! I'm sorry."

"You haven't made an engagement, have you?"

"But I have, dear."

"Where?" he asked impatiently. It was none of his business. But she said:

"Mr. Smull asked me to dine with him and Frank Donnell. Are you going to be lonely, dear?"

"Where are you dining?" he demanded impatiently.

She did not resent it: "In Mr. Smull's apartment."

"Do you think that's the thing to do?" he asked sharply.

"Darling! Isn't it?"

"Are you accustomed to dine with married men in apartments which they maintain outside their homes?"

His anger and insolence merely astonished her:

"Barry dear," she said, "it is merely a business matter. He asked me to meet Frank there and discuss my next picture. I can't understand why you seem offended—"

"Do you think it's agreeable for me to expect an evening with you, and suddenly discover that you have arranged to pass it with Albert Smull?"

"I'm sorry. . . . I can't very well help it—"

"It's perfectly rotten of you!" he retorted in a blaze of boyish temper.

"Barry dear?"

"What?"

"You mustn't talk that way to me."

"Then don't deserve it—"

"Barry!"

"Yes." There was a pause. He waited. Then her voice, rather low and quiet:

"To control my own temper it is necessary for me to keep reminding myself that you love me. . . . Perhaps you wouldn't speak that way if you didn't. . . . Perhaps men are that way. . . . I'm sorry I'm not dining with you. . . . I'm sorry because I'm in love with you. . . . And always will be. . . . Good-night, dear."

"Eris!"

"Yes, dear."

"I'm ashamed—penitent—miserable. I'm rottenly jealous——"

"Darling! You have no cause——"

"No. But—I can't bear to think of you alone with other men. I know it's all right. I know also that jealousy is a low-down, common, disgusting, contemptible emotion——"

"Barry! I *want* you to be properly jealous of my safety and well-being. I adore it in you, you funny, delightful boy! I'm not experienced with men, but I'm beginning to understand you. Darling! You may even swear at me if you want to—if you do it's because you're in love with me."

The girl, laughing, heard the boy sigh: "It's doing queer things to me," he said, "—this love business. All I can think of is you; and when you're away I just dope myself with work. . . . I don't mean to be selfish——"

"I *want* you to be. Be a perfect pig if you like, darling. Bully me, threaten, monopolise me—oh, my dear, my dear, give me my allotted time to work, learn, and make good; and then I promise—I *promise* you all that is within me to give—mind and soul, Barry—utter devotion, gratitude unmeasured, all, all of me—darling!——"

She was late,—nearly three-quarters of an hour late, when she arrived at Albert Smull's apartment on Park Avenue.

A man servant directed her to a rear room fitted amazingly like the boudoirs she had read about.

It was a charming place hung with a sort of silvery rose-silk; and on an ivory-tinted dresser everything that femininity could require, brand new and sealed.

But Eris spent only a moment at the mirror, and, the next, she was shaking hands with Albert Smull in a delightful lounging room, slightly aromatic with a melange of flowers and tobacco.

"I'm sorry to be late," she said with smiling concern,

"but I'm so relieved to find that Mr. Donnell hasn't yet arrived."

"We won't wait dinner for him anyway," said Smull with his near and eager smile. "He'll have to take his chances, Eris. . . . I say, you're stunning in that gown!"

"Oh, do you like it?" she said politely.

He repeated emphatically his admiration; seemed inclined to touch the black fabric; expatiated on fashion, suitability, harmony of snowy skin, red hair, and the smartness of dead black—"Only the young dare wear it, and usually they're too stupid to until they're too old to."

A grave-faced servant brought three cocktails.

"Come, now, Eris, it's time you learned," he insisted. "Be a good fellow and you won't be sorry. I've got to drink Frank's cocktail anyway. You'll have it on your conscience if I have to drink yours too!"

To be rid of his insistence she touched her lips to her glass, set it back on the tray, and wiped her lips when he wasn't looking.

Smull's ruddy visage was ruddier after the third cocktail. The grave servant opened two folding glass doors; Smull gave his arm to Eris.

Everything in the dining-room was suffused in a glow merciful to age and exquisitely transfiguring mortal youth into angelic immortality.

The sheer beauty of the flowers, of the silver and glass; the white walls, the antique splendour of mirror and painting entranced the girl.

Faultlessly chosen, perfectly served, the dinner progressed gaily, and without the visible embarrassment of Eris who, however, was conscious of a vague uneasiness, and who wondered why Frank Donnell did not arrive.

There was champagne. She touched the glass with her lips, but all his gay cajolery and persuasion could not induce her to do more.

She glanced at his face from time to time, noticing the

deepening colour with curiosity but without uneasiness; always politely returning the fixed smile that never left those two little blackish brown eyes set a trifle too close together.

Politely, too, she awaited Smull's introduction of the subject matter to be discussed—the reason, in fact, and the excuse for her presence at this man's table.

But Smull talked of other matters,—trivial matters,—such as her personal beauty; the personal success she might make over sentimental men if she chose; the certain surprise and jealousy of other women—but what women, and of what sort he did not specify or make very clear.

"You ought to get on," he said, almost grinning.

"I'm trying to," she laughed.

"Oh, sure. I mean—" But what he meant seemed to expire on his heavy lips as though lack of vocabulary, or perhaps of assurance, left him dumb for the moment.

She wondered why Frank didn't arrive. Coffee was now to be served in the lounge, which was part library, part living room.

Eris understood she was to rise: Smull joined her with his familiar arm taking possession of hers. His large, hot hand made her a little uncomfortable and she was glad to free her bare arm and retire with her coffee to a solitary arm-chair.

The grave-faced servant seemed to know what to bring to Mr. Smull in addition to the frozen mint offered to Eris—and smilingly declined.

After the grave one had retired with the empty coffee cups and had closed the folding glass doors, Eris looked enquiringly at Mr. Smull, awaiting the broaching of what most closely concerned her.

But Smull, half draining his frosted glass, assumed a familiarity almost boisterous.

"See here, Eris, you're not going to get on unless you're a good fellow. You're not going to get anywhere if you don't learn to keep up your end."

"If you mean cocktails and champagne," she said, laughing, "I can't help not liking them, can I?"

"Certainly you can. Once you get the first glass down you'll begin to like it. Come on, Eris! Show your pep. I'll have Harvey bring you some champagne——"

"I'm wondering," she said, "why Frank Donnell doesn't come. Have you any idea, Mr.——"

She looked up as she spoke, and fell silent. Smull's fixed smile had become a fixed grin. Out of a red, puffy face two darkish little eyes rested on her with disconcerting intentness.

"Look here, Eris, we don't need Frank Donnell. It's up to me, after all. Isn't it?"

Her lips unclosed, a trifle stiffly: "Why yes, I suppose so——"

"Well then!"

She met his grin with a forced smile.

"Well?" she enquired, "have you chosen to discuss matters with me alone?"

"You bet. That's right, Eris. That's what. You get my first curve for a homer, little girl."

He hunched his chair nearer to hers: "Look here, Eris; you can have pretty nearly what you want out of me. You want your own company for keeps? O. K.! You want to pick your director and your camera-man? That's O. K. You want Frank Donnell? Sure!——"

"But Betsy——"

"Don't worry. I pay his salary. I pay hers, too. If you want Frank——"

"No, I don't. I wouldn't do such a thing——"

"Puff! She'd do it to you. Didn't she put you out of her company!"

"She was right. It was perfectly understood by me——"

"Say, sweetness, don't you let anybody put that over. Betsy couldn't stand your competition and she canned you. Now you can get back."

"Thank you, Mr. Smull, but I couldn't. . . . Not that I—I care for Mr. Creevy very much——"

"Bing! He's out! Who do you want?" He hunched his chair closer: "And say, sweetness, are you getting enough per?"

"What?"

"Are you satisfied with your contract?"

"Yes."

"You mean you don't want a raise?"

She said, rather bewildered: "I have signed for three years——"

"Blaa! What's a contract! You can have them both. Stick 'em in the fire. Is that right?"

"But——"

"Listen, my dear. You ought to get what Blythe's getting the first year. After that we'll see. What do you say?"

"It is too kind of you——"

"Let me worry over that. Are we set? You have what you want—anything you want. You fix it up and I'll O. K. it. Is that right, sweetheart?"

The girl looked at him in a dazed way. He left his seat, came over, seated himself on the arm of her chair. As she rose, instinctively, his arm brushed her bare shoulder.

And now he also stood up, his hot, red features, and the grin and the little darkish eyes very close to her face.

"See here, Eris," he said thickly, "I'm crazy about you."

A slight chill possessed her, but she was calm enough. She said: "I'd rather not understand you, Mr. Smull."

The grin never altered: "Why not?" he demanded.

"For one thing, if you honestly cared for me you wouldn't have brought me here alone to say so. . . . For another——" she looked at him curiously; "—you are married, aren't you?"

"Is that going to matter when a man's crazy about you——"

"Slightly," she said.

"—Crazy enough," he went on, ignoring her comment, "—crazy enough to tell you to hand yourself whatever you fancy? Do you get me right? You can have whatever—"

"I don't want anything," she said wearily, moving toward the door.

He made the mistake of laying hands on her—hot, red, puffy hands; and she struck him across his fixed grin with all her strength.

Breathless, motionless, they fell back, still confronted. A streak of bright blood divided his chin, running down from his mouth, dripping faster and faster to the rug.

He got out his handkerchief, staunched the flow, spoke while the handkerchief grew sopping red:

"That's all right, sweetness. Sorry I was premature. You take your time about it—take all the time you need. Then give me my answer."

"I'll give it to you now," she said unsteadily.

"I don't want it now, Eris—" She smiled: "You've already had part of it. The rest is this: I'm engaged—or practically so—to a man I'm going to marry some day. . . . And, as to what you've said and done this evening, I'm not very much shocked. They said you were that kind. You look it. . . . I'm not angry, either. The whole affair is so petty. And you don't seem to know any better. I think," she added, "that I'm more bored than annoyed. Good night, Mr. Smull."

"Eris!"

"What?"

"If I were divorced would you marry me?"

"No," she said contemptuously. "And that's *that!*"

To the man at the hall door she said: "Please call a taxi for Miss Odell," and passed on to the silver-rose boudoir where she took her scarf and reticule from a chair and tossed Smull's orchids onto the dresser.

"Oh, dear," she thought to herself, "— such cheap, such petty wickedness! If I'm out of a job it will complete the burlesque."

At the hall door the servant had vanished and Smull stood waiting.

"I'm sorry, Eris," he said.

"I'm sorry, too. You won't want me for another picture, I suppose."

"Would you stay?"

"I have to, don't I? There's my contract, you know."

"Good God, Eris, I didn't realise I loved you seriously. I'm half crazed by this; I—I don't know what to do—"

"Then let me suggest that you talk it over with your wife," she said. "That ought to be a household remedy for you, Mr. Smull."

She passed him, stepped to the lift, rang, turned and laughed at him with all the insolence of virgin intolerance.

"You little slut," he said in a distinct voice that quivered, "I don't get you but you've played me for a sucker. You're out! Do you get that? Now run to your Kike attorney with your contract!—God damn your soul!"

As she stepped into the lift she thought: "—Burlesque and all." But the strain was telling and she was close to tears as she went out into Park Avenue and got wearily into her taxi-cab.

"Oh, dear," she said in a low voice. "Oh, dear." But reaction was tiring her to the edge of drowsiness. She yawned, wiped the unshed tears from her eyes with her wisp of a handkerchief, yawned again, and lay back in the cab closing the grey virgin eyes that had looked into hell and found the spectacle a cheap burlesque.

CHAPTER XXVI

IT was not yet ten o'clock when Eris arrived at Jane Street. Gutters stank; the heated darkness reeked with the stench of stables, slops, and unwashed human bodies.

Sidewalks still swarmed; tenements had muted and disgorged; every alley spewed women and men in every stage of undress. Fat females with babies at breasts squatted beside dirty doorsteps; dishevelled hags hung out of open windows, frowsy men sprawled on chairs, or nude to the trowsers, looked down from rusting fire-escapes at a screaming tumult of half-naked children shouting and dancing in the cataract of spray from a hose which two firemen had opened on them from a hydrant.

Flares burning redly on push-carts threw smoky glares here and there as far as Greenwich Avenue, where the light-smeared darkness was turbulent with human herd.

Into this dissonance and clamour, clothed in silk, came Eris, daughter of Discord. As in a walking dream she descended from her taxi; fumbled in her silken reticule to find the fare; paid, scarcely knowing what she was paying.

As she turned and ascended the low steps of her house, still searching about in the reticule for her latch-key, she became aware that a man was standing in the vestibule.

When she found her latch-key she glanced up at the shadowy shape.

Then the man uttered her name.

Instantly his voice awoke in her ears that alarming echo which sometimes haunted her dreams. And though the man's features were only a grey blur in the obscurity, she knew him absolutely.

For an instant all her strength seemed to leave her body, and she sagged a little, sideways, resting against the vestibule wall.

The shock lasted but a second; blood rushed to her face; without a word she straightened up, stepped forward, re-fitted her latch-key.

"Eris," he whimpered, "won't you speak to me?"

As she wrenched open the front door, light from the hall gas-jet fell across the man's pale visage, revealing his collarless shirt and shabby clothes.

Already she had set foot inside. Perhaps the ghastly pallor of the man halted her—perhaps some occult thing within the law held her fettered in chains invisible. She stood with head averted, dumb, motionless, grasping her key convulsively.

"My God," he whispered, "won't you even look at me?"

"What do you want?" she asked in the ghost of a voice. Then, slowly, she turned and looked at her husband.

"I'm sick——" He leaned weakly against the vestibule door, and she saw his closing eyes and the breath labouring and heaving his bony chest.

What was this miserable creature to her, who had cheated her girlhood and struck her a blow that never could entirely heal?

What had she to do with any sickness of this man and his poverty and misery?

"Why should you—come—to me?" she asked. Suddenly she felt her body quivering all over. "What do I owe to you?" she cried, revolted.

He muttered something;—"In sickness and in health—till—till death do us—part——"

A dry sob checked his mumbling. He shook his head, slightly. His heavy eyes closed.

She stood staring at him and holding the door partly open. Twice she clutched the knob in nervous fingers as

though to slam the door in his face and bolt out this pallid spectre of the past. She could not stir.

"What is the matter with you?" she finally forced herself to ask.

He opened his sick eyes: "Hunger—I guess——"

"You may have money if you need it. Is that what you want?"

He seemed to summon strength to stand upright and pass his bloodless fingers over his face.

"It's all right," he muttered thickly; "I didn't mean to bother you——"

He turned as though to go, steadyng himself with one shaky hand on the stoop railing. At the door-step he stumbled, swayed, but recovered.

"Stuart!" she burst out, "come back!"

He pulled himself together; turned toward her: "I don't want money. . . . I'm too sick——"

"Wait! You can't go into the street that way! . . ."

He seemed so shaky and confused that she took hold of his ragged arm. Very slowly, and supported by her, he entered the doorway. They climbed the stairs together, wearily, in silence.

Hattie usually went home at night and arrived, by key, early in the morning. Eris unlocked her door, lighted the corridor, went on to the living-room and lighted that. Then she returned to her husband and led the way to the kitchen and pantry and lighted them both.

"There is a chair," she said. "I'll make you some hot coffee."

She flung a cloth over the kitchen table, laid a cover, brought what there was in the ice-box,—cold lamb, sardines, butter, fruit. She went again to the pantry and sliced bread for him. Then she started the gas range in the kitchen.

"I'm putting you to a great deal of trouble," he mumbled. She paid him no attention but went on with her prepara-

tions. When finally she returned with the steaming coffee she found he had eaten nothing.

However, he drank some of the coffee. After that he slumped on his chair, dazed, inert, his lack-lustre gaze on the floor. But his bony, bloodless fingers—those long, clever, nimble fingers she remembered—picked aimlessly at everything—at his face, at his clothing, at the sliced bread.

"Have you been ill long?" she forced herself to ask.

He mumbled something. She bent nearer to understand, but he fell silent, continuing to pick and fumble and stare at space.

"Do you feel very ill, Stuart? I want you to tell me."

"If I could have—a little whiskey—or something—to buck up—"

She rose, got the gift bottle that she had been saving; brought it to him with a tumbler; left him there with it.

As she turned her back and walked nervously toward the front of the house, he peeped after her out of shadowy eyes, not lifting his head. Then he poured out half a glass of neat whiskey, steadily enough, swallowed it, looked around.

In the living room Eris flung scarf and reticule on the sofa, stood for a moment twisting her fingers in helpless revolt; then, fighting off nervous reaction, she paced the room striving to think what to do, what was right to do in this miserable emergency.

Did she owe this man anything more than she owed to any sick, hungry, ragged man? If so, *what?* How much? How far did the law run that fettered her? What were the statutes which exacted service? And the ethics of the case—*what were they?* Anything except the bare morals involved? Anything except the ordinary humanity operating generally in such cases and involving her in obvious obligation? Were they the obligations which once involved

those who looked upon Lazarus and "passed by on the other side"? Were they really more vital?

She went slowly back to the kitchen. Hearing her approach, her husband had crossed both arms on the table and dropped his marred face in them.

"Are you really very ill, Stuart?" she asked calmly.

"No. I'll go—" He tried, apparently, to get to his feet; fell back on the chair, whimpering.

There was a small room off the pantry where, in emergency, Hattie sometimes slept on a box-couch.

"You can lie down there for a while if you wish," she said. She helped him get up; he stumbled toward the pantry, guided by her, to the couch in the little room beyond. Here he sank down and dropped his head between his hands. She had turned to leave but halted and looked back at him from the pantry doorway.

"I had better call a physician," she said, frightened by his deathly colour.

He might have explained that his pasty skin was partly due to prison pallour, partly to drugs. Instead he asked for a little more whiskey.

"I don't want a doctor," he muttered; "I'll be all right after a nap. This whiskey will pull me together. . . . You go to bed."

After a while he looked up at her, rested so, his shadowy eyes fixed on her with a sort of stealthy intentness.

"You'd better sleep if you can," she said. "I'll have to wake you soon. It is growing very late."

"Oh God!" he burst out suddenly, "what a wreck I've made of our lives!"

"Not of mine," she retorted coolly; and turned to leave.

"I'm sorry," he whined. "I didn't mean to get you in wrong. . . . I meant to go straight after we were married. . . . But they got me wrong, Eris, they got me wrong! . . . It was the very last job I ever meant to do. . . . I gave up

the plates. That's how they let me off with a light one. . . . I'm out over a month, now——”

“Were you in—in *prison*?” she demanded with an overwhelming surge of disgust.

He began to snivel: “You couldn't get over *that*, could you, Eris? . . . And what I did to you—getting you in wrong—disgracing you that way——”

She made no answer but her grey eyes grew cold.

“You couldn't ever forgive me, could you, Eris?” he whimpered, watching her intently.

“I can forget you, in time, if you keep away from me. . . . But—it is terrible to see you—*terrible!*”

He licked his dry lips, furtively, always watching her.

“If ever you would let me try to make amends—if you'd just let me work for you,—slave for you——”

For an instant she stared at him, incredulous that she had heard correctly. Then wrath set her cheeks ablaze: but her voice remained controlled, and she chose and measured her words:

“Listen to me, Stuart: I wouldn't let you lift a finger for me; I wouldn't let you touch me,—I don't expect ever to see you again,—I don't want even to hear of you. And that's *that!*”

“Do you hate me so bitterly, Eris?” he whimpered, cringing but always watching her face.

“It isn't hate. For what you did to an ignorant girl—for your deception, your meanness, your lying, I have no *hatred*. I don't hate: I merely rid myself of what offends me.”

He began to snivel again, seated on the edge of the box-couch, swaying from side to side:

“I know I shouldn't have married you. But I wanted to go straight. I was madly in love with you, Eris—and I haven't changed. Haven't you a word for me——”

She gazed at him with a loathing in which no saving spark of anger mitigated the cold disgust. She said, slowly:

"All I need ever say to you can be said through a lawyer. That is all that concerns you. If you wish to lie down, do so. I don't want you here; but I wouldn't turn a sick snake out of doors."

She left him and went back to her bed-room. For an hour she sat there, unstirring, waiting, listening at moments. The flush remained on her cheeks; and into her eyes there came a glint at times, as where storms brood behind grey horizons.

The day, indeed, had bred storms for Eris—for Eris, daughter of Discord—sitting here in her dim chamber all alone.

Twice after midnight she had gone to the little room off the pantry, only to find her husband heavily asleep. He seemed so wretched a thing, so broken, so haggard, that she had yet not found courage to awake him and send him into the street.

So now, once more, she returned to her bed-room and her sombre vigil; sat there brooding, waiting, listening at intervals, wondering what to do, and how, and when.

The fatigue of that unhappy day had strained her nerves, not her courage. But for the advent of this miserable man she would have had leisure to think about what was to be done for the future and face the fact that she was out of work.

Now she felt too weary to think—too tired to examine the situation which so suddenly confronted her when Albert Smull flung his last insult in her shrinking face.

Troubles thickened about her; trouble was invading her very door; but she was too sleepy to consider the misfortunes that involved her—the menacing situation at the studio—the sordid problem in the next room.

Her little mantel clock struck two o'clock before she finally summoned energy to rise and go to awaken her husband.

He seemed to be in a sort of coma. Only after she

twitched his sleeve repeatedly did he unclose his dangerous eyes. And then he merely muttered fretfully that he was too weak to move and meant to sleep where he lay until morning.

"You can't remain here all night," she said. "I can't permit that. Do you understand, Stuart?"

But he only turned over, muttering incoherencies, and buried his dishevelled head in his ragged arms.

Not knowing what to do, she went wearily back to her bed-room. Twice, trying to think what to do, she fell asleep in her chair. The second waking found her on her feet, blind with sleep, but with instinct leading her to lock and bolt her bed-room door. . . . That is the last she remembered for a while.

She awoke, lying diagonally across her bed, fully dressed, in the dull, rosy glow of her little night-lamp. Something was scraping and scratching at her door. She turned her head, saw the door-knob twisting very softly, now this way, now that.

She got up from the bed and went quickly to the door.

"If you don't leave this house," she said in a low voice, "I shall telephone for a policeman."

"Take me back, Eris," he whined. "As God sees me, I love you! I'll work my fingers to the bone for you——"

"Leave this house," she repeated.

He tried the door again, gently, then wrenched at the knob. Suddenly he threw his full weight against the door. But they wrought well in the days when that old house was built.

Listening, she heard him moving off, softly, and realised he had removed his shoes.

For a long while she continued to listen, but heard no further sound from him. There was not the slightest sense of fear in her, merely loathing and weariness unutterable.

She went back, finally, to the bed and lay down across it.

Four o'clock struck in the living-room. After that she remembered listening and trying to remain awake.

She had been sleeping heavily for two hours when Eddie Carter, alias E. Stuart Graydon, tried the bolt with the blade of a kitchen knife. He had contrived, also, to fashion another instrument out of a steel fork. Neither of these worked.

As half past five struck in the living-room, where he was seated, he concluded that the other plan had become inevitable. He had hoped it might be avoided. But the girl he now had to deal with was no longer the ignorant, impressionable child he had so easily moulded to his fancy.

There were two matters which preoccupied this man: the first, a genuine passion for the girl-wife he had been forced to abandon. Whatever this sentiment was,—love or a lesser impulse,—it had been born the moment he lost her; and it had painfully persisted through those prison months.

The second matter which absorbed him was hatred for the man who had sent him to a second term in prison. The charge was forgery; the firm of Smull, Shill & Co. procured his arrest.

On these two matters his mind had remained fixed until the poignancy of brooding became intolerable; and he sought relief in prison-smuggled drugs. Which, so far, was the history of Eddie Carter, addict, and penman par excellence.

Now, hunched up in an armchair in her living-room, he studied the immediate problem of Eris, picking eternally at the upholstery with scarred fingers, or at his clothing, his face, his own finger-nails—the skin around the base of the nails raw from long habit of self-mutilation.

His first plan of enlisting the girl's sympathy had proven hopeless. There remained the alternate plan.

Six o'clock sounded from the mantel clock. He got up and went to the pantry, where was a telephone extension for servants. With some difficulty and delay he got the person he was calling:

"Say, Abe, it's Eddie. I've done what you said for me to do——"

"I didn't tell you to do anything!" interrupted his lawyer, angrily. "Get next to yourself or I quit right now! D'you get that, you cheap dumbbell?"

"Sure! But listen, Abe. I'm *here*. I've been here since ten o'clock last night. We're *both* here, Abe——"

"Is it fixed up?"

"No, Abe; and I want you to come right now. You understand, Abe——"

"Cut out the Abe every other word," interrupted the attorney wrathfully. "What are you trying to do to me? Act like you got sense or I'm through!"

"All right. Take it on the run. I'll let you in. You better not stop to shave; it's six, now."

"I'll be around," replied the lawyer briefly.

He came in a taxi-cab. Eddie Carter saw him from the front window, went downstairs in his stocking-feet, and let him in.

Climbing the stairs again they came into the living-room without exchanging a word; but here Carter pointed to the closed door of Eris' bed-room.

"Asleep?" inquired the other, still breathing hard from the ascent.

"I don't know. She's locked in."

The lawyer looked at him: "So she locked you out? When?"

"Last night."

"Wouldn't she make up?"

"No."

"Well, we'll have to fix it——"

There was a silence ; then the short, fat attorney took hold of Carter's arm and spoke close to his ear :

"Get this right ! When she unlocks that door to come out, *you came out with her !*"

"You saw me," nodded Carter.

They began to prowl around the apartment. In the kitchen the lawyer whispered: "She must have some kind of a maid that comes by the day."

"Yes, a nigger. Her name's Hattie. You going to buy her, Abe?"

"We don't have to. She's our witness anyway," added the little fat attorney, with a hint of a grin.

At that moment a key rattled in the kitchen door.

CHAPTER XXVII

AS Eris was entirely alone in the apartment at night, it had been her custom to lock and bolt her chamber door,—a rough neighbourhood and rear fire-escapes making it advisable.

So now, when the rapping on her bed-room door aroused her, she rose mechanically, still drugged with sleep, made her way blindly to the door, and unlocked it.

As she opened her door so that Hattie could enter and draw her morning bath, the sight of the coloured woman's agitated features startled her.

Suddenly a glimpse of Graydon in the living-room beyond brought the girl to her shocked senses.

There seemed to be another man there, too—a fat, bald, bland little man who smiled and bowed to her, flourished a straw hat, clapped it on his shiny head, and immediately waddled out of the apartment.

For one dreadful moment a premonition of disaster paralysed the girl, blanched her face.

Then she walked straight into the living-room where her husband slouched against the mantel, his hands in his pockets, an unlighted cigarette sagging over his chin.

“Get out of this house!” she said in a low voice that quivered.

“Send that wench of yours to the kitchen,” he retorted coolly.

Suddenly something about this man frightened her. It was a vague, formless fear. But it was fear. She felt the chill of it.

“Will you leave this house?” she managed to say.

"You listen to me first."

Again a swift, indefinite fear silenced her. Danger was written all over this man. What menaced her she did not know, had no vaguest guess. But never before had she looked into eyes so perilous.

When she found her voice:

"You may start breakfast, Hattie," she said.

"Start some for me, too," added Graydon, without removing his gaze from Eris.

And, when the lingering servant had gone, reluctant, perplexed, still loitering in the dining-room devoured by curiosity, Graydon said quietly:

"Eris, I want you back! That's what's the matter. Take me back. You won't be sorry."

"Who was that man who came here?" she demanded.

"He needn't matter—if you'll give me a chance to make good—"

"I want you to tell me who that man was!"

"Answer *me*! Will you take me—"

"No! Now, who was he?"

"My lawyer," he said, "—if that interests you."

"Did you telephone for him, or was it already arranged?"

"If you'll listen to me—"

"Answer *me*!"

"I called him up. . . . I hope I shan't need him—"

"Are you threatening me with scandal because I let you sleep here last night?"

"There's no scandal—as long as you *are* my wife—"

"How long," said she, "do you suppose I shall remain married to an ex-convict?"

Graydon laughed, fished in his soiled vest for a match, lighted his cigarette:

"You've condoned whatever I've done, Eris," he said.

"What!"

"You've no case. You've condoned my offence. I guess you'll have to remain married to me, Eris."

For a full minute she failed to understand, watching him intently, searching for the sinister import of his words.

Suddenly her face flushed scarlet. The hideous thing confronted her.

"You see," he said coolly, "you can't afford to face a jury, now."

"I see," she said. "You have two witnesses. Also, *you* have nothing to lose, have you!"

"Yes, I have."

"What?" she asked.

"You! . . . I have *you* to lose. And I'm going to make the play of my life for you——"

His hideous features altered and a rush of startling colour painted his cheek-bones with two feverish smears:

"You listen to me, now, and hold your tongue! I know what you're up to!" he said in a voice that broke with passion. "I've trailed you; I've followed you; I've kept tabs on you."

"When you're not playing up to young Annan you're vamping Albert Smull. Yes, you are! Don't stall! You go to his fancy apartment alone. You go to Annan's house. You've got 'em both on your string. You've got others. Any man who meets you falls for you!——"

He flung his chewed, wet cigarette into the fire-place; he was trembling all over.

"You may think it's because you're making a wad of money that I'm trying to get you back! That's all right, too; I'm glad you are on easy street. I need money, but not much.

"It's *you* I want. And whatever you say or think, I *was* in love with you when I married you. I *had* to beat it. It drove me almost crazy to leave you. Two years in prison drove me crazier. I've been sick. I'm sick now. I'll get well if you take me back. . . . And if you won't——" He came closer, looking intently into her eyes: "If you *won't* —well, there's *one* man who isn't ever going to get you,

Eris. . . . And his name's Albert Smull. . . . And the next time I find him loafing around you, you'd better kiss him good-bye. For, by Jesus, I'll fix him good!"

The girl seated herself on the arm of a chair. Her head was reeling a little, but she kept it high.

"How much money do you want?" she asked.

"I need that, too. I'll take twenty-five dollars if you can spare it. And I'd like a cheque with it. You're making good money: I guess five hundred won't crimp you."

Her silk reticule still lay on the sofa where she had flung it the night before. She picked it up, took from it the money he required, and handed it to him.

Her cheque-book was in her desk. Seating herself she opened it and wrote out the amount he had demanded, blotted the strip of yellow paper, gave it to him.

"Now," she said, "I've paid you to keep away from me until I free myself. After that the police can take care of you if you annoy me."

He smiled: "When you consult your attorney you'll realise that you have no witnesses and no case, little lady."

"I need only one witness," she said.

"Who?"

"Any — physician." Suddenly her white fury was loosened and she took him by his ragged arm and shook him till he stumbled and almost fell.

"I tell you this," she said, her grey eyes blazing, "because you had better understand it in time to save yourself from another term in prison! For if you ever dare contest the action I shall bring with the vile lie you threaten, any witness I call will send you back to a cell,—and your attorney with you! And that's *that*, damn you!"

Her hand fell away from his sleeve. He stood motionless, sickly white as though something vital in him had been shattered.

For, as he stared at her, he never doubted that she had spoken the truth. And the truth meant his finish.

As he stood there, stricken dumb, his bony frame was shaking slightly and sweat chilled his face. He groped for control of what mind his drugs had spared him,—strove to clear it of chaos, formulate some thought, some charge of misconduct against her—something to involve her with some man. And knew, somehow, that it would be useless. The girl had not lied. Any witness she chose to call meant her vindication.

After a long while he passed his scarred fingers over his face, wiping the sweat from his eyes. Then he turned, slouched toward the door, opened it. And, on the sill, slowly faced around and looked back at her.

“You win, Eris,” he mumbled. “I guess you’re good. . . . Stay so, and I won’t bother you. . . . But I won’t stand for any other man. . . . Don’t make any mistake there. . . . I mean Albert Smull. I know him. I know how he gets women. You think you stop him but he’ll fool you every time. . . . He’s a rat. . . . You keep away from him. . . . That’s all.”

He went, shambling, dull eyed, ghastly, picking at his face with long, scarred fingers.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AS the door closed behind Graydon, Hattie appeared from the dining-room and sullenly confronted her mistress.

"I ain't a-going to stay," she said.

Eris looked up, blankly, still pale and confused by the gust of passion that had swept her.

"I don't have to work in no such kinda place," continued the coloured woman doggedly, "and I ain't a-going to. Mah week's up Friday, but you pay me up to las' night an' I'll go now."

The girl comprehended. A painful colour surged over her face to the roots of her hair.

"Very well," she said in a low voice. She went to her desk, opened an account book, then drew a cheque for the balance of the woman's wages.

Hattie took the cheque, hesitated: "Of co'se," she ventured, "if yo' wishes me to stay, Miss Eris, mah wages will be jess ten dollahs mo' a week. Any real lady would be glad to gimme that foh all I does——"

"I don't need you," said the girl quietly. "Go as soon as you can get ready."

"Suit yo'se'f, Mrs. Graydon," retorted Hattie, with elaborate disrespect, "and if I may kindly persume to be excused, Mrs. Graydon, I will attend to the requiahments necessary fo' my departure."

Said Eris: "Pack your effects, Hattie, and call an expressman. I shall not expect to find you loitering here when I return."

The coloured woman's eyes snapped as Eris entered her bed-room and closed the door.

To bathe and dress did not take her very long.

When she came out she was dressed for the street. There was no breakfast on the dining-room table, but she wanted none.

She went to the kitchen and found Hattie seated, feeding on hambone, and her rickety valise still unpacked.

"I want you to be out of this apartment by noon," said Eris quietly. Then she opened the hall door and ran downstairs, Hattie's malignant laugh ringing in her ears.

When Eris had disappeared, the negress waddled to the gas stove, lit it, and started to make herself a cup of tea. She meant to do what gastronomic damage she could short of theft.

Before the kettle boiled, the telephone rang. To ignore it was a haughty pleasure for Hattie; but presently African curiosity prevailed and she got up and waddled to the telephone, muttering to herself.

"Yaas, suh?" she replied to some query.

"Who?"

"Mistuh Annan?"

"No, suh, she ain't home. Dey's nobody home 'cept'n myse'f."

Annan said: "I've some flowers. I'd like to arrange them to surprise Miss Odell. Could I bring them around, Hattie?"

"Suit yo'se'f, suh. It ain't botherin' me none."

"I'll be right around," he said gaily.

She went sullenly back to her kettle, meditating mischief.

Annan arrived in a few moments, laden with long, flat boxes of pasteboard. He nodded pleasantly to Hattie, took his flowers to the living-room, returned to fetch a dozen plain glass vases, jars and rose-bowls, and went happily back to the business of decoration.

He remained very busy for half an hour or more, filling

the vases at her bath-tub, clipping stems, trimming too profuse foliage, arranging the sheaves of fragrant bloom, and carrying each vase to its proper place in the three rooms.

When he had finished, and on his way out, he stopped to speak to Hattie at the dining-room door:

"Please ask Miss Odell to call me up when she returns," he said. "I suppose she has gone to the studio," he added.

"I don't know, suh. Miss Eris' husband he stayed here las' night. I reckon she's payin' him a call, maybe."

Annan stared at her as though she suddenly had gone mad.

"Yaas, suh," continued the negress, "I'se quit, I has. Too many doin's in this here flat to suit me. I guess you all didn't know Miss Eris had a husband sleepin' here," she added with a bland malignance that stunned him.

He inspected the wench in silence for a moment, then turned sharply on his heel and went down stairs.

His taxi was waiting. He drove directly home, entered his study and sat down to the sorry business of waiting.

All the morning and afternoon he waited there, his face white and set, his grim gaze fixed on space.

About five o'clock he called up. The house did not answer.

Eris had asked him not to call her at the studio for obvious reasons, and he never had done so, except by previous agreement. But now he decided to do so. He got the doorman, Flynn."

"Yes, sir; Miss Odell come in half an hour ago."

"Is the company working?" inquired Annan nervously."

"No, sir, nobody's here to-day except Miss Odell and Mr. Smull—"

"Who?"

"Mr. Smull, sir. He just come in a minute since— Hold the wire, please."

After a minute or two the doorkeeper's voice: "She's busy, sir. She can't talk to you now—"

"Did Miss Odell tell you to say that?"

"No, Mr. Smull told me she couldn't talk to nobody just now."

"Call up Mr. Smull again and tell him Mr. Annan wishes to speak to Miss Odell at once!"

"I don't like to—all right, hold it again——"

Annan waited. Suddenly Smull's voice: "Annan?"

"Yes."

"Sorry, but the little lady can't be interrupted just now——"

"Yes, she can. She isn't working. Tell her to come to the wire!"

"There's a business conference——"

"Will you kindly say to her that I wish to speak to——"

"Sorry," interrupted Smull, and hung up in his ear.

Annan picked up his hat, descended the stairs, and went out.

About five minutes after he left the house his telephone rang. Mrs. Sniffen answered it, and recognised the voice of Eris inquiring for Annan.

"I'll see if he's in, Miss——"

"Did he call me a few minutes ago, Mrs. Sniffen?"

"I couldn't say, Miss; I was in the kitchen. I'll see if he's in his study——"

She returned in a moment to say that Mr. Annan was not in.

"Thank you," came the girl's hasty voice.

Eris hung up the receiver of the telephone in the directors' office at the studio, where Smull stood.

"Now will you believe me?" he demanded.

"I heard you ask if it were Mr. Annan," she said. "I could hear perfectly well from my dressing-room."

"I thought Flynn said it was Annan and I asked," insisted Smull, "but it turned out to be a *Herald* man who wanted copy. So now if you'll listen to me, Eris——"

"I have already tried to make you understand that I have no interest in anything you say——"

"For God's sake, be charitable and overlook what a man says and does when he's drunk——"

"I don't think you were——"

"I was, I tell you! I carry it that way. I turn ugly. When I get a few highballs in me I'm a different kind of man. . . . Look here, Eris, if you'll be a sport and call it off, I'll give you my word, as long as you and I are friends, never to touch a drop of anything!"

"I wish you would let me alone," she said in a colourless voice. "I don't know how you knew I was here——"

"I told Flynn to notify me as soon as you arrived——"

"That was insolent of you——"

"Good heavens, Eris, I couldn't let things stand as they were, could I? The memory of my beastly behaviour to you was driving me crazy. Anyhow, you've a cheque coming to you and I had to get at the books——"

"That is Mr. Creevy's business. . . . I didn't come here for that, either. I came to gather up my personal belongings——"

"Listen, Eris. After all, I've given you your chance, haven't I? I've backed you with real money. Except for that one break last night I've played square, haven't I? All right. Are you going to quit me cold?"

"I've got to——"

"You're going to put this outfit on the bum? You're going to walk out on us?"

"You told me I was out."

"Can't you forget what a souse says when he's all to the bad? What'll we do if you leave us flat? Do you think it's a cinch to pick another like you? What'll this bunch do? What'll Creevy do, and Shunk? Look at this plant! I've got it for a year more. Do you know what our overhead costs me a week? Listen, Eris; have a heart. Don't do that to us——"

"It's what *you've* done, Mr. Smull, not I. You've spoiled any pleasure I might have had in working for you. I couldn't go on here. I couldn't do good work. When you told me, last evening, that I was out, you were right. I was out as soon as you said so. It was final. . . . Truth always is final. . . . I learned it last night. . . . There is nothing further to learn."

She walked slowly past him to the door and looked out across the great, barnlike place all littered with the lumber and canvas of half-demolished sets, tangles of insulated wires and cables, and sprawling batteries of lights of every sort.

In the heated stillness of the place a light footfall echoed sonorously across the flooring. The chatter of intruding sparrows came from the arches overhead. Outside sunny windows ailanthus trees, intensely green, spread motionless fronds under the July sky.

Eris moved on, slowly, to her dressing-room—a built-in affair with its flimsy partition adjoining the directors' office.

Chintz and paint had mitigated the bareness of the room with its extemporised dressing table and couch and a chair or two.

For a while she was occupied with her make-up box; then, locking it, she opened her suitcase and began to lay away such articles as belonged to her.

As she locked and strapped it, Smull appeared at her door, and she rose in displeasure, although the infraction of rule meant nothing to her now.

"Your cheque," he said, extending it.

"Thank you, I don't want it."

"It belongs to you. . . . You could hold me for the balance of the year if you chose, and not do a stroke of work."

Her short upper lip curled shorter in contempt:

"I release you, Mr. Smull."

"I want you to take this, anyway——"

"No."

"Please, Eris——"

"No!" She picked up her suitcase and make-up box. But he continued to block the doorway.

"Eris! Eris!" he stammered. "Don't do this—don't leave me! My God, my God!—I—can't stand such—such cruelty——" His face was heavily flushed and his fat neck was swelling red behind the ears.

He began to tremble and stammer again—"I'll do anything you ask—give you anything—if you'll only listen—Eris——

"Eris—my God, I want to marry you! I want you! I'll keep away until I can get a divorce——"

He caught her arm in his hot, red hands; suddenly clutched her body, crushing her face against his with an inarticulate cry as though strangling. And she fought him back, savagely, in silence, bruised, wild with the shame of it. Both chairs fell; he trod on one, crushing it to splinters, and his powerful shoulder tore the mirror from the wall and wrecked the dressing table with it.

With a desperate wrench she tore free of him. They stood, panting, watching each other for a full minute. Then her grey eyes dilated with horror, for he slowly took a pistol from his pocket, his near-set black eyes, all bloodshot, fastened on her.

"You listen to me," he said brokenly, his great chest heaving with every word,—"I want you because I can't live without you. . . . Will you marry me?"

"No!"

"If you don't," he said, "I'll blow my brains out in your face."

There was a terrible silence. Then he said:

"If you leave this room I'll kill myself. . . . It's up to you, now."

Another silence.

"Well, why don't you go?" he said.

"I—am going." She picked up the suitcase and make-up box. Watching him, she began to move slowly toward the door—passed him where he was standing, slowly, never taking her eyes off him.

She reached the door.

"I swear I will do it!" he shouted.

She looked at him coolly over her shoulder.

"You are too fond of yourself," she said. And walked on.

CHAPTER XXIX

AT the head of the stairway Eris, carrying her suitcase and make-up box, encountered Flynn, the voluble doorkeeper, coming upstairs.

"Miss Odell," he began, half way up, "the same gentleman that tellyphoned you is downstairs askin' for you with a taxi-cab. I wouldn't leave him come up after what the Governor told me. 'No, sir,' says I, 'ye can't see Miss Odell. I have me orders,' says I, 'and I'm door watch here,' says I, 'and whin the Governor says to me, "Flynn, do this; Flynn, do that," be gob it's meself that does ut!' Was I right, Miss Odell?"

"I couldn't see any newspaper man now," she assented, nervously.

"So I told Mr. Annan, Miss," commented the doorkeeper, relieving her of her baggage.

"Was it *he* who telephoned? I—I understood it was a *Herald* man—"

She continued on down the stairs, followed volubly by Flynn. Outside the barred gate she saw Annan standing beside a taxi-cab. Flynn opened the wicket. She went out.

"I didn't know it was you," she said. "They misinformed me. I'm so sorry."

The girl looked white and tired. One shoulder of her frail summer gown was torn to the elbow and there were red bruises on the skin already turning darker.

"What is the matter?" he demanded bluntly, retaining the nervous hand she had offered and touching her torn sleeve with the other,

She noticed the damage, then, for the first time; the hot colour swept her face.

"An accident," she murmured. "The place is impassable—a jungle of lumber and knocked-down sets. . . . Will you please drive me home, Barry?"

"Where is Mr. Smull?"

She lifted her gaze to the man beside her, then calmly turned to Flynn and bade him place her luggage in the taxi. Something in Annan's eyes had alarmed her.

"Is Smull here?" he repeated.

She did not answer.

An instant vision of Smull's heavy black pistol and a swift intuition that Smull was capable of using it on anybody except himself,—these thoughts paralysed her tongue.

She looked dumbly at Annan. The stillness of his drawn face terrified her.

"Barry, come with me——"

"Wait a moment," he said, but she caught his hands desperately.

"Help me," she whispered, "I need you. I tell you I need you——"

"I'm going to help you."

"Barry! You will destroy me!"

She meant that he would destroy himself, but intuition shaped her speech.

"I want you to take me home," she said. . . . "It is the first thing I ever asked of you. Will you do it?"

"Could you wait till I—speak—to Smull?"

"No. Take me *now!*"

He hesitated. She had clasped his arm. Her weight on it was heavy; her face had grown deadly pale. He looked at her closely; looked down at her torn sleeve.

"Is—is it anything that *he* did?" he demanded harshly.

She put out one hand blindly, reaching for the cab door; wrenched it open; sagged heavily on his arm. He almost

lifted her into the vehicle; and she crumpled up in the corner, her eyes closing.

Annan spoke to the driver, cast a quick, grim look at the gate, then turned and jumped into the cab.

"Now," he said, drawing her head to his shoulder, "we won't talk until we get home. If you feel faint we can stop at a chemist's. Lie quietly, dear."

She lay against his shoulder, perfectly inert—so still that, at moments, he leaned over to see her face, fearing she had fainted.

Neither uttered a word. His thoughts had made glimmering slits of his eyes and had set the hard muscles working around his jaws.

But all the girl thought of was to get him away from that heavy black pistol and from the man whose neck had swollen red behind the ears.

For suddenly in that moment when she had seen that terrifying expression on Annan's face, a new and vital truth had flashed clear as crystal in her brain. She saw it; saw through it; knew it for Truth.

With her, Truth was always final. It settled everything for her in whom no tiniest seed of self-deception ever had germinated.

And Eris knew now that whatever became of her career, this man beside her, who was her lover, was something more, too. He was a care. He was a responsibility. He was something to be defended; something to be guided.

For in that instant of fear in his behalf her whole being responded with passionate solicitude.

Now she was beginning to comprehend that this solicitude for him must always be hers while life endured; that the overwhelming instinct to defend, protect, guide the man who must always be a boy for her, dominated all else; and would always rule her every thought and motive; her every plan, every action.

She was beginning to understand that she must have her

way with him as a mother with her son; that, to do so, she must contrive, scheme, prepare, foresee, and above all, love.

And, above everything, even love,—if truly in her life this man had become the passion paramount—she must be prepared to give. And supreme, even above love and above giving, she must give up!

She lay unstirring on his shoulder, her lids drooping, thinking, understanding, searching, accepting.

It had happened. It was true. Chiefest of all in life, and suddenly, and in the twinkling of an eye, had become the passionate necessity for the happiness and well being of this man.

And she knew that she would give her life without a second's hesitation to protect his. And she knew that in her heart, her mind, her soul, he came first. And all that even most remotely pertained to him. And then, only, came herself. Which was her career. The career, hardly begun, to which she had dedicated all the best in her of belief and effort. The career which, germinating, had filled her ardent heart of a child, which had budded in girlhood, and was in earliest blossom, now. The career for which she had so gratefully gone shabby, had starved, had slept under the stars in public parks.

Lying there on his breast she felt it slipping away—slipping through her slender fingers on his breast. And if, for an instant, her small fingers clutched at what was slipping through them, it was his coat she grasped. And held, tightly, knowing now what truly was her goal and what above all else she must hold her whole life through.

“Dear,” he said gently, “we are here. Do you feel strong enough to stand, or shall I carry you?”

If her smile were faintly wise it also was tenderly ironical. God knew—and had whispered to her—who it was between these two who would do the carrying; and who it would be who was carried by the stronger.

"Darling," she murmured, "you're so funny. I only needed a nap because I didn't sleep last night."

"Have you really been asleep, Eris?"

"Well, I had visions, anyhow. Please pay this frightfully expensive taxi and carry up my luggage, because Hattie has left and I'm going to cook our dinner."

They climbed the bare and poorly lighted stairs. Eris fumbled for her keys, selected the right one, and opened the door. The whole place was sweet with the scent of flowers.

As always, the girl's gratitude was out of all proportion, for anything offered her; and now, in the living-room, she stood enchanted, gazing at the flowers, touching them here and there with finger tip and lip.

"Oh," she murmured, "you are so sweet to me, Barry. . . . And you must have brought them and arranged them while I was out." She turned, happily, and took both his hands. And saw the darkness of impending trouble in his clouded face.

"Darling?" she exclaimed.

"It's nothing, Eris. . . . That miserable wench of yours lied about you. . . . I suppose I'd better tell you——"

"What did she say, dear?"

"That—I can't!—and it was a damned lie——"

"Perhaps it wasn't. Tell me."

"I'm ashamed to. . . . She said a man was here—all night——"

"Oh," she said disdainfully, "that was my husband. He pretended to be ill and starving and I let him in. When he got inside he tried to bully me. So I locked my door; and in the morning I turned him out."

In the girl's healthy and flushed contempt, making of a sinister situation only a squalid commonplace, the boy's formless fears—all the tragic perplexity faded, burned out in a wholesome rage.

But into her grey eyes came the swift shadow of anxiety again and she took hold of him, impulsively, by both elbows.

"What am I going to do with you!" she cried in tender exasperation. "Will you smooth out that scowl and mind your business, darling? I can manage my own affairs. I've never been afraid of anything—except to-day. My only fear in the world is that you'll get into mischief—"

"Well, do you think I'm going to sit still and let—"

"Will you mind your adorable business, Barry? You worry me. You're on my mind. I've got to marry you as soon as I can I realise *that*—"

He caught her in his clasp, fiercely.

"You *will*!"

"I've got to—"

"You promise?"

"Good heavens, yes!" she looked up at him, laughing.

Suddenly her eyes filled. She tore his arms away and took him to her breast in a fiercer, closer clasp. Then the long tension broke with her cry:

"Barry—Barry," she breathed brokenly, "you belong to me—you're *my* boy! You're all I ever owned in all my life that really belonged to me. . . . I—I had a—a heifer"—she was laughing hysterically—"but I had to sell her—and *they* kept the money. . . ."

She clung to him, strained him to her in an abandon of long-pent need, incoherent between convulsive tears and the sobbing laughter that shook her slender body:

"You want me, you need me, don't you, Barry? You're lonely. No boy ever should be lonely. It is the wickedest thing in the world—that any child should ever be lonely for need of love. . . . You *are* a child! Mine! You're all I care about. . . . And I'm going to marry you because you want me to—because we both want to—Barry, my darling—my boy who belongs to me—"

CHAPTER XXX

BEFORE she could inherit this boy who had willed himself to her, Eris had to do everything for herself and she knew it.

For a day or two she abandoned herself utterly to Annan. Night alone separated them. Early morning saw them united.

The hot, sunny July days they spent in the surf at Long Beach, or in motoring through Westchester. Evenings they dined together on some cool roof, or by the sea, and returned to whisper happy intimacies together until long into the morning hours.

Every lovely self-revelation of this girl more utterly turned the boy's head. Desire became absolute necessity. Necessity became dependence. He did not understand that. He supposed the dependence was hers—that, in the turbulent torrent of Life he was the rock to which she clung.

It was well that he thought that. It was well that she let him think so. It always is best for a man.

Once, during those heavenly days, he met Coltfoot walking with Rosalind Shore on Fifth Avenue.

"I thought Eris would break with Albert Smull," drawled Rosalind. "What a sketch he is!—schmoozing about and telling everybody he had to let her go! Betsy's got him buffaloed. He's afraid of her parents; that's all that holds Albert. . . . I get banged around a lot, but Mom's a pretty good policewoman, and God help the Johnny with fancy intentions towards her little Rosie." She looked at Coltfoot, standing beside her, with faintest malice.

Coltfoot's sophisticated retort was a bored smile. But it was to Annan he spoke, asking him how his work was going.

"What do you care how my story is going?" said Annan, laughing. "You're an enemy to realism, and that's all I write."

"Realism! You don't know what it means," said Coltfoot bluntly. "What you write isn't realism. If you want realism, study your pretty friend Eris! She's real. Everything about her is genuine. Study her story. That's realism. Not as *you* once wrote it," he added disgustedly, "but devoid of ugliness and tragedy and sob-stuff. *She* doesn't whimper. She doesn't know how to pose. The *beau geste* and the attitude mean nothing to her. Sob-stuff is wasted on her. Health never snivels. Do you get that, Barry? *Health!* That's the key. And by the Eternal, it is the usual, not the unusual that is wholesome. The great majority are healthy. That's realism. And when health is your keynote you have beauty, too. And *that* is Realism, my clever friend!"

"Am I real because I am beautiful, Mike?" drawled Rosalind, "or beautiful because I am real?"

So these three parted with the light jest of Rosalind floating between them in the sunshine.

But Annan went on, a trifle out of countenance, to keep a rendezvous with Eris at the Ritz.

At luncheon he said abruptly: "The stuff I do, Eris—you know I'd like your opinion—I mean while I'm doing it. . . . Or rather, I'd like to talk over the story with you, first, before I begin it."

The girl looked up over her peach-ice. Her eyes were very clear and still.

"What I want," he explained, "is a perfectly fresh eye—a fresh mind and a—a bystander's point of view. . . . Not that I don't most deeply respect you as an artist——"

"It would make me very happy," she said, "to have your confidence in such things."

"Well, I have a lot of confidence in your judgment. I'd like to consult you. . . . Perhaps—I don't know—no man does know when his nose is too close to his work—but I'm rather afraid I've been getting away from things—facts—"

Her eyes grew tenderly humorous: "Whatever you get away from, Barry, you can't ever get away from me. I'm the Nemesis called in to chasten you and clip those irresponsible wings. . . . I know a little about wings. I used to dream of them. Do you remember I once told you?"

"About your flight. And how you found the god of Wisdom seated all alone on the peak of Parnassus dissecting a human heart?"

"So you remember."

"Yes; and I remember that little play you wrote in school—the story of the wish, the wings, and the new hat."

She laughed, but there was the slightest shadow over the grey eyes. The shadow which renunciation casts, perhaps.

"I took a longer flight than to Olympus," she said, "and it was you I discovered above the clouds;—all by yourself, Barry,—on a funny little world, spinning up there—"

"Was I busy dissecting somebody's heart?"

"Mine—I guess."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing, sweetheart; you never shall regret marrying me. Never shall I by look or word or deed interfere with your career. If I do, chuck me!"

She smiled—that tender, intelligent smile which lately was one of her charming revelations that vaguely surprised him. For the gods were granting her a little time yet—a little respite for a career the limit of which already was visible to her.

He had told her, diffidently, that he was not obliged to live economically; that what he had was hers, also; that there always was sufficient to finance any arrangement she wished to make for her own productions.

But the girl who had returned a hundred dollars to him when she had only twenty more in all the world was no more capable of accepting such an offer than of requesting it.

Besides, no sooner had it been rumored that Eris Odell and Albert Smull no longer coöperated, than telegrams began to pour in from all sorts of people, responsible and irresponsible. Offers arrived from keen, clever, capable and ruthless producers, with releases guaranteed, and who wished to fetter her for years at the lowest figure; from enthusiastic people new in the game, with capital guaranteed but no release. Scores of communications came from various birds of prey who infest the fringes of the profession—the “don’t-do-anything-till-you-hear-from-me” boys; the noisy, persistent Gentile who lies for a living and whose only asset is the people he traps; the Jew, penniless and discredited, determined to make a commission out of anybody and undeterred by the dirt of the transaction.

All of these communications Eris laid before Frank Donnell.

Theirs was a close and sober friendship,—sombre even, at times—because Frank Donnell had been in love with her since her first awkward step in the Betsy Blythe company. The girl knew it; both knew, also, that the matter was hopeless.

And for Frank Donnell, Eris was conscious of a gravely tender affection she never had felt for anybody else in her brief life.

He had saved enough money to finance one picture for her; and he could have secured guarantees from the best of the releasing companies on his own name alone. But, again, it was one of those things that Eris could not do. It was desirable; it was legitimate business. But to use the resources of any man to whom she had given any intimate fragment of herself was not possible for Eris.

And, although Frank Donnell never had said one word of

love to the girl; and she always had ignored a fact that from the beginning had been touchingly plain to her; there never could be any speculative combination between them. It was her way.

But, following his advice, an arrangement had been made possible for one year between her and a great producing company. And of this proposed contract she informed Annan.

Together they consulted Annan's attorney, Judge Wilmer; and the first steps, in her suit for annulment of that unconsummated farce of marriage, were taken.

Eris had not thought of going away that summer, although her contract did not call her to report for duty until October.

But early in August she began to feel a desire to be alone for a while—a need for solitude,—leisure for self-examination.

Lately, too, she had thought much of her home. Not that she missed the people who inhabited it. There never had been any tie between her and her father.

But the girl cherished no resentment toward him. And toward Mazie all her instincts always had been friendly.

Often she had thought of Whitewater Farms, not regretting, not even missing the home where she had been born, unwelcomed.

Yet, in these last weeks, a desire to go home for a while had developed, and had slowly increased to a point where she coupled it with her increasing necessity for quiet and rest.

The girl was tired—saddened a little, perhaps. That is the aftermath of all effort, the reaction from all attainment, the shadow that dogs knowledge. And it is the white shadow cast by Happiness.

There were other things, too, which directed her thoughts unconsciously toward the only home she ever had known.

Eddie Carter had been annoying her again. She never

spoke to Annan about it. But her husband was always writing to her, now. Every few days brought begging letters, maudlin appeals, veiled threats concerning Albert Smull's supposed attentions to her,—maundering, wandering, incoherent epistles born of the drugs he used, perhaps.

And this was not all. Little Leopold Shill, Smull's partner, wrote to her in behalf of Smull, begging her to pardon his unpardonable offences, expressing concern over Smull's desperate state of mind, begging her to be generous and merciful to a man whose flagrant conduct had been due to love alone—to a mighty and overwhelming passion which bewildered him and made him really irresponsible.

To Leopold Shill's two letters she made no reply. And Shill did not write again. But Smull did. He had been writing to her twice a day. She never replied. After the first letter she destroyed the others without opening them.

But the annoyance was telling on her.

Sometimes, from her window, she saw Smull's limousine pass and repass her door, and the man's red face at the window peering up at her house.

At times the car stood for hours on Greenwich Avenue, where its occupant commanded a view of Jane Street.

More than once, on the street, Smull had accosted her, even followed on behind her.

Lately, too, it became apparent to the girl that her husband also had been watching and spying on her, because he wrote a violent, crazy letter insisting that she warn Smull to keep his car out of her neighbourhood:

“—I've been keeping tabs on you,” he wrote. “Now, I'll keep an eye on that”—unprintable epithets followed, nauseating Eris; and she burned the letter without reading the remainder.

One evening in early August Albert Smull, standing beside his car on Greenwich Avenue and waiting for Eris to leave her house, noticed a shabby individual apparently watching him from the opposite corner.

On a similar occasion, a day or two later, he noticed the same shabby man on the same corner, staring steadily across the street at him.

After a few recurrent glances, a vague idea came into Smull's brain that the shabby man's features were familiar to him.

Ordinary cowardice was not Smull's kind. He walked leisurely across the street and came up to the shabby man and coolly scrutinised him.

"Well, by God," he said calmly, "*I thought* I'd seen you before. I heard you were out of prison. What's your graft now, Eddie?"

"*Yours*," replied Carter.

Smull, puzzled, awaited further explanation. Carter, twitching all over, stood digging at the bleeding roots of his finger nails.

"Well," inquired Smull with his close-eyed, sanguine smile, "what do you suppose is *my* graft, Eddie?"

"My wife."

"Hey?"

"My wife, Eris Carter."

Smull's features turned a heavy crimson. After a silence:

"So *that's* the situation," he said heavily.

Carter ceased twitching. He said very distinctly: "When you and Shill sent me up the River, that's what you did to me, too. . . . On the day I was married to her, that's what you did to me. You made a crook out of me because you didn't pay me living wages when I worked for you. Then you made a jail-bird out of me. Now, you've made me a bum."

"And that isn't enough for you. You want to make a prostitute out of my wife."

"Shut your filthy mouth," said Smull coolly.

"I'll stop your filthy mouth if you don't keep away from my wife," said Carter in a still, uncanny voice.

Smull laughed. "Beat it," he said.

And, as Carter did not stir: "Get a move on, you dirty bum. Come on! . . . Or shall I have to hunt up a cop to give you the bum's rush?"

Carter's visage turned ghastly:

"All right; I'll go. . . . But you'll go farther yet if you don't let my wife alone."

He took one step toward Smull, hesitated, then, twitching all over, he turned and shuffled away down Greenwich Avenue, digging his thumbnails into his mangled fingers.

CHAPTER XXXI

ERIS went home early in August.

One fine afternoon, a week later, lonely as a dog that has lost its master, and, like a lost dog, finding all things perplexing in the absence of the Beloved, Annan, wandering along, chanced to pass one of the great Broadway picture-theatres; and noticed Betsy Blythe and Rosalind Shore standing in the lobby.

They always welcomed him with affection. They did so now. Betsy fairly bubbled energy, radiant in the warm sun-rays of success, impatient for further triumphs, excited, gossipy, cordial, voluble.

"I told Albert Smull I wouldn't renew my contract unless Frank Donnell went with it," she said. "And I've nailed Frank for five more years, Barry,—and my camera-man, too. That is the only way to handle people—tell them exactly where they get off. And off they'll get every time!"

"I'd like," remarked Rosalind lazily, "to see anybody handle Mom that way."

"What are *you* going to do next season?" inquired Annan without much curiosity.

"Sing a little song in a punk little play, for that's where I belong and that's my little lay."

"She's got a sure fire comedy," added Betsy, "and she's the whole show. She wears practically nothing, by the way. But it's horribly expensive."

"Where does it get me?" drawled Rosalind. "I'm fed up. I don't want to work."

"What do you want to do?" inquired Annan, amused.

"You'd be surprised. . . . I'd like to get married and quit.

"Betsy knows. I'll tell you, too, ducky. I'd like to marry Mike."

"Who?" he demanded, astonished.

"Mike Coltfoot, ducky. He makes a living. And I make Mom's. There's the hitch. Mom would have my life. And Mike would draw a corpse."

Annan took her by both hands: "Bless your nice little heart," he said, "I never dreamed that you and Mike cared for each other."

"I don't know how *he* feels; I only know how he says he feels," she said cynically. "But, oh God, the fireworks if Mom gets next! Do you wonder I'm fed up with work?"

Betsy said: "I tell her that if she feels that way about her profession she'd better walk out on her mother and marry Mike. I follow what I love. Every person ought to. . . . By the way, what has become of Eris, Barry?"

"She has gone home for a rest," he said carelessly.

"Where? Back to the pigs and cows?"

He reddened. "She's gone to her home at Whitewater Farms."

After he had departed, Betsy looked at Rosalind; her rosy mouth made a small oval.

"What did I do to *him*?" she asked.

"He's spiked," nodded the latter. "I'm spiked myself, but if ever you see me as solemn about it as Barry is, why, kick my shins, dear, and accept gratitude in advance."

Then she turned to shake hands with Coltfoot, who came sauntering up, hat in hand.

"Hello, old top," she said. "You're half an hour late, but I'd wait a lifetime for anybody who resembles you. Come on in and see Betsy cut up on the scr-r-r-een!"

Since the departure of Eris, Annan's appetite had become an increasing source of worry to Mrs. Sniffen.

That evening he left most of his dinner untouched. When he had been writing all day he often did that. But he had done no writing for days.

To Mrs. Sniffen's fears and remonstrances he turned a deaf ear, denying that he was not perfectly well.

"When does the last mail arrive?" he asked. He asked her this every evening, now, and she always instructed him, but he seemed to forget.

He went upstairs to his study, dropped onto the lounge, lighted a pipe. What else was he to do—with the mainspring broken.

He didn't want to work. He didn't intend to do any more writing, anyway, without the close coöperation of Eris. Something, evidently, was the matter with his work and he was certain that she was capable of telling him what it was. He knew that he was going to take a new view of things in general, but he wanted her to point it out. He wanted to start right; and be kept on the track for a while until accustomed.

That, insensibly, he had become dependent upon the mind of another person, did not occur to him. At least not definitely.

He realised that the world meant Eris, and that without Eris he had no other interest in the world, now.

And, to this man who never before had evinced any interest in the world except as it concerned himself, it did not seem odd that every vital principle in him now surged around and enveloped this girl. The girl he had found asleep in a public park.

Wherever he went, whatever he was doing, his mind was on her. Not selfishly; although a deep instinct was always telling him that whatever real work he ever was to do would come through her.

Nor did he seem to think it odd that his personal ambition now remained in abeyance. Fluency, too, seemed to have departed: nimble mind and facile pen, the careless arrogance

of youth and power, the almost effortless ability, flippant juggling with phrase and word, and the gay contempt for the emotion with which his audience responded when he tossed up the letters of the alphabet and let them fall into words—all these seem to have died.

Without analysing it he was feeling already the tension of a new gravity in his character. It came, perhaps, from the constant presence of an unknown god—the one that always seemed to be waiting at the elbow of Eris—waiting to be recognized before speaking. The god with a thousand faces whose name is Truth.

He appeared to be on friendly terms with Eris. But Annan had not yet become familiar with his faces.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN Eris decided to go home she gave her lover a few hours' notice and went without further preliminaries or fuss.

Annan met her in the station,—a very sober-faced young man, solemn and sad.

It was she who offered the serious kiss of parting; she who retained his hand, tender, reluctant, candidly concerned as to his health and welfare if left for a while entirely self-responsible.

Neither saw any humour in the situation.

“Please write me every evening, Barry,” she urged. “And if you don’t sleep well, take a glass of hot milk when you go to bed.”

“All right, but how about you?”

“Oh, I’ll let you hear from me,” she nodded absently; “—but I shall be rather anxious if you fail to write me every evening. You won’t neglect to do it, will you?”

Finally he began to think her solicitude was mildly funny.

“If I had a mother,” he said, “that’s about what she’d say to me. Who do you think is running this outfit, anyway. Eris?”

“You, darling.”

His masculine smile made this obvious. And the solemn directions he gave her about danger of catching cold in a country house, about changing shoes and stockings when she came indoors, and his warning concerning fried foods and sudden change of drinking water were specimens of psychological self-assertion which settled his real status.

They kissed again as soberly as two children. She followed her Red Cap through the gates, not looking back.

He turned again to a city desolate.

The journey proved tedious and hot. Her Pullman porter brought her a paper-bag for her new straw hat. He brought her a pillow, also; and luncheon later.

She had plenty of reading matter provided by Annan, but it lay unopened on her lap; and Annan's fruit, bon-bons, and flowers lay on the floor at her feet.

All that sunny morning and early afternoon she lay listlessly in her chair, watching the celebrated and deadly monotonous river, content to rest, unstirring, unthinking, her grey eyes partly closed, the water a running glimmer between her fringing lashes.

At East Summit she changed to the local. She recognised the conductor who took her ticket, but it was evident he did not know her, and she was content to let it go that way.

Familiar farms sped into view, fled past, succeeded by remembered hills and brooks and woods.

Reaping already was in progress on some farms. She noted, mechanically, the cattle as she passed through a dairy country. Mostly Holsteins. She saw a few Ayrshires with their Noah's Ark horns; a herd or two of Guernseys—not to be compared to the Whitewater cattle as she remembered them.

Summit Centre held the train until people finished getting on and off, and the last crate of raspberries was aboard.

Summit and the great Sanitarium came next. It was here she had seen her first picture-folk in action. A little tightening of lip and heart—lest any atom of courage escape—then the train moved on.

West Summit—a cross-roads, no more. And after a little while, Whitewater.

She got out with her suitcase, her books, illustrated papers, bon-bons, fruit, and flowers. A number of people looked

twice at her to be certain before speaking. Men looked oftener, shy of speaking.

She returned greetings smilingly, exchanged common-places when necessary, aware but indifferent to the curiosity visible in every face.

There was a new bus driver. She gave him the baggage-check, got into the vehicle with hand luggage, flowers, books, periodicals, bon-bons, and fruit.

Two commercial men bound for Whitewater Inn were inclined to assiduous politeness. She remained scarcely aware of them. She exchanged salutations with Gumbert, the butcher, who got off at his shop. Otherwise, her fellow travellers were unknown to her and unnoticed.

It was a mile to Whitewater Farms.

The country looked very lovely. It had rained that morning; grass and foliage were fresh; gullies still ran water; brooks gurgled bank high.

The sun, low in a cloudless sky, flung rosy rays across green uplands and here and there a few acres of early stubble. Trees cast long bluish shadows. Cattle were beginning to wander toward the home-lane. It would be near milking time at Whitewater Farms.

And now, leaning wide of her window in the clumsy bus, she could see the gilded weather-cock a-glitter on the main barn and swallows circling above brick chimneys.

At the front gate her trunk was dumped. She paid the driver fifty cents; watched him drive away; then turned and looked at the white house with green shutters, where she had been born. It had been newly painted.

The world seemed very still there. She set her suitcase beside her trunk, laid flowers, books, periodicals, fruit, bon-bons on top of it, and walked slowly around the house to the dairy.

One of her half-brothers, Cyrus, came out in his white, sterilised milking jacket and trousers, chewing gum.

"Well, f'r Gawd's sake," he said when the slow recognition had been accomplished.

She offered her gloved hand and he took it with a plowman's clasp and wrung it, shifting from one leg to the other—rural expression of cordiality—legs alone eloquent.

Commonplaces said, she made inquiries and learned that everybody was well.

"Go right in, Eris! Pa's getting into his milkin' duds; Ma she's cookin' supper. Go right in, Sis! I guess you know the way—" loud laughter and a large red hand under her arm to pilot and encourage.

In the kitchen Mazie turned from the range, then set aside a skillet, wiped both hands on her apron, and took Eris to her ample bosom.

When she had kissed her stepdaughter sufficiently: "Pa!" she called, "oh, Pa! Get your pants on and come down here quick!"

Elmer was already on his way downstairs, clump, clump, clump. He halted at the kitchen door, buttoning his snowy jacket, gaping stolidly at Fanny's child.

For he knew her instantly—Eris, daughter of Discord.

"Hello, Dad," she said uncertainly.

"Hello. . . . Waal, waal, I'll be jiggered! Waal, dang it all! . . . So you took a notion to come back, did you?"

"If you'll let me stay for a little while—"

"Why, Eris, how you talk!" exclaimed Mazie. "This is your home; ain't it, Pa?"

Elmer buttoned the last button of his milking jacket:

"She can stay if she's a mind to. She allus does as she's a mind to," he replied grimly.

"Now you quit, Pa," remonstrated Mazie, cheerily. "Eris, you go right up to your own room. Everything's just like you left it. Where's your trunk? All right; Si and Buddy will take it up." And to her husband: "Pa, I'm surprised at you. Ain't you a-going to shake hands with your own daughter?"

"Gimme a chance," he grunted.

He offered Fanny's child a horny paw, gave her fingers one pump-like jerk.

"Time you come home," he observed. "I guess you want your caaf money, don't you?"

"Not if *you* need it," she replied tranquilly. "Is the farm doing well, Dad?"

Mazie said, laughingly: "He's only foolin'. He's making more money than he can spend, Eris. You take your heifer-money when you're good and ready. It's down to the bank and all safe and snug."

Eris smiled at them both: "Where's that blue checked gingham dress of mine?" she inquired. "If it's clean I want to milk."

"I guess you've kinda forgotten how," drawled Elmer. "You jest better set and rock and read into them novels you allus liked—"

"I want to milk," she repeated with a humorous glance at Mazie.

"Come right up to your room then, Eris. I'll show you where I put that gingham." And, to Elmer: "You hush your face, Pa. Eris can milk any cow she's a mind to. Come along, Eris—"

But the girl lingered on the stairs: "What is the herd bull's name, Dad?" she asked curiously.

"We got White Cloud now. Lemme see,—was it White-water Chieftain when you was here—"

"Yes. . . . I want to see the herd come in. I'll hurry, Dad—"

She ran upstairs after Mazie.

Her father passed his huge hand over his face absently; then, very deliberately, he scratched his grizzled head.

Si broke the silence: "She's a hum-dinger, Pa. I'll say so."

"Hey?" grunted Elmer, scowling at his son.

"Ain't she?" insisted Cyrus.

"Waal, I dunno. She dresses kinda tidy."

"She looks like she did when we all seen her on the screen," said Si. "I guess she's made her pile. They all get big wages in the movies. You gotta go to the city to make big money——"

"G'wan down to the barn," said his father drily.

The first murmur of discord already: and Fanny's child scarcely arrived!

Elmer's frowning face was lifted to the floor overhead—a moment—then, heavily he followed his own and unmistakable offspring down to the milking barn.

In her room the sight of objects long forgotten filled her heart;—and the odour of the house, the particular odour of her own room—melange of dyed curtains, cheap wall-paper, ingrain carpet—a musty, haunting odour with a slight aroma of fresh air filtered by forests.

Two of her half-brothers appeared with her luggage.

Buddy, grown fat and huge, shyly shook hands with her and fled. Mazie kissed her again and retired, taking Si with her, whose fascinated gaze had never stirred from the only real actress he ever had beheld.

Eris seldom cried. But now she sat down on her bed's edge and buried her face in the pillows.

Tears flowed—tears of relaxation from strain, perhaps. And perhaps the girl wept a little because she really had nothing here to weep for—no deep ties to renew, no intimate memories of tenderness.

Bathed, her bobbed hair hatless, and in gingham and apron, Eris went downstairs and out across the grass.

Below, winding into the barn-yard, tonk-a-tonk, tonk-a-tonk, came the Whitewater herd. Here and there a heifer balked and frisked; now and then a cow lowed; and the great herd-bull, White Cloud, set the barn vibrating with his thunderous welcome to the returning herd.

Red sunshine poured through the lane, bronzing the silky

coats of moving cattle. Overhead, martins twittered and dipped and circled. There was the scent of milk in the still air—of clover, and of distant woods.

In the milking barn she encountered old Ed Lister. He seemed to have grown much older, and there was a dim bluish look to his eyes.

Eris shook hands with him.

"How-de-do," he said, peering at her. And answered, "Yes, marm," and "No, marm," as though in his mind there was some slight confusion concerning her identity.

She passed along the stanchions, petting and caressing the beautiful creatures, dropping handfuls of bran, tossing in a little clover-hay.

Everywhere satin-smooth coats were being wiped off, udders bathed in tepid water. The cattle were busy with bran and hay or drinking from the patent buckets.

Eris went to the calf-pen, where fawn-like heifer-calves, pretending shyness and alarm, soon came crowding to lick her hands.

She looked at the bull-calves; at the two young bulls selected to aspire to future leadership.

She went to the bull pen, where the herd-bull, White Cloud, gazed curiously upon her, sniffed her hand, stretched his massive neck to be rubbed and fondled, rolling contented and sentimental eyes.

Her half-brothers, Gene and Willis, came in wearing spotless white. Greetings were friendly and awkward; and presently they went on into the western wing to attend to the cows on test there.

Her father and Cyrus were already milking. Buddy was in the loft; Ed Lister sat with gnarled fingers clasped and dim gaze fixed on the cattle, quiet, solemn, aged.

Eris walked slowly along, reading the names of the cows affixed to each stall—Mazie of Whitewater Farms, Star-Dust, White Gentian, Guelder-Rose of Whitewater, Snowberry Lass, Moon-Queen, Apple-bloom's Daughter—

She took milking-stool and pail and seated herself by Guelder-Rose, who became a trifle restive.

"So, lass!—soo—lass," she murmured, stroking the white and golden skin. And in a few moments the pail vibrated with alternate streams of milk.

"Well, Dad," she said, "have I forgotten?"

Elmer grunted. Then, abruptly:

"Guelder-Rose is by Whitewater Chieftain outa Snow-Rose, with a record of eleven thousan' six hunder'n' ten an' two-tenth pound uv milk, an' five hunder'n' twenty-one, forty-seven pound uv butter-fat in class G."

"That is a fine record, Dad," said the girl cordially.

"I guesso. Yes. An' that there Moon-Queen; she's got a record uv eleven six fifty-four an' three-tenths and five sixty-two, thirty-four. Herd sire, Chieftain; outa Silver Frost's daughter, Snow-Crystal of Whitewater——"

"Outa Lass o' the Mist," croaked Ed Lister in uncompromising correction.

"You're right, Ed," admitted Elmer.

For a time there was no sound save the hissing of milk in the pails.

Eris carried her pail to the steelyards, weighed it, took the pencil dangling by its string and filled in her memoranda opposite the name of Guelder-Rose. Then she transferred her attentions to Apple-bloom's Daughter.

"Made a lotta money, Eris?" inquired Elmer abruptly.

"Some."

"Waal, I guess you spent it, too."

"No."

"Hey? Got it yet?"

"Most of it, Dad."

"Waal, I'll be jiggered. . . . What you aimin' to do with it, Eris?"

"Save it."

"Any investments?"

"Some."

"What d'ya buy? Wild-cats?"

"Liberty bonds."

"Gosh!"

Cyrus' voice from behind a cow: "You gotta go to the city to make money."

Elmer said: "You poor, dumb thing, they'd skin ya. You ain't got a gift like Eris. G'wan an' weigh your milk 'n' shut your face."

Cyrus muttered for a while. Eris said: "There seems to be too many people for the jobs in New York. . . . The poor are everywhere. . . . I've seen them sleeping in the grass in the public parks."

"Ya hear that, Si?" demanded Elmer.

Unstirring, solemn, dim of eye, Ed Lister spoke: "I was to York in '85. I seen things in my day."

Elmer said to Eris: "Ed he worked in West Fourteenth Street. He knows what, too, same's you."

"I was a-truckin' it fur Amos T. Brown & Company," said the old man shrilly. "I was a hefty fella, I was. I seen doin's in my time, I did. But they hain't nothin' into it. You spend more'n you git down to York. Yes, marm."

Cyrus sniffed derisively, unconvinced. Buddy, having shaken down sufficient hay, came in with a sack of lime.

"You most done?" he inquired. "Supper's ready, I guess."

CHAPTER XXXIII

ANNAN'S letters came to her every day. She answered infrequently,—not oftener than once a week.

Other letters were forwarded from Jane Street,—persistent letters from Smull begging to know where she had gone,—abject letters betraying all the persistence of a man who knows no pride, no shame in pursuit where there ever had been an end to gain.

Eris read only the first of Smull's letters. The others went, unopened, into the kitchen range.

Twice, also, her husband wrote her,—evidently aware of annulment proceedings,—vaguely threatening her in case she married Smull,—furnishing her with a mass of filthy detail concerning Smull's private life, menacing her and him, pleading,—sometimes begging for money.

She read both letters, sent them to her attorney, and cleansed her mind of them and of the creature who had written them.

The time was shortening; the days were drawing near when she must report for work. . . . Her last year of work, perhaps. . . . The last year, maybe, of her screen career.

She wrote to the man who already had become the object paramount of her life:

“Dearest:—

“Your daily letters reassure me. You do me a great kindness in writing them. Long ago, before I knew what love was, your unvarying kindness won me. Always, to me, it remains the most wonderful thing in the world.

"We are not yet in full autumn here at Whitewater Farms. Few leaves have turned. Except for miles of golden-rod and purple asters on fallow and roadside, and acres of golden stubble, and the wine-red acres of reaped buckwheat, one would scarcely believe that summer had ended in these Northern hills.

"I went to-day to Whitewater Brook, where I encountered the first person connected with pictures I ever had seen. You will laugh. It was poor old Quiss.

"He was fishing. He didn't possess much skill. He called me 'sister' and 'girlie.'

"I clung to him as a cat clings to a back fence. I pleaded, I implored for his aid and advice.

"Poor old fellow, I always shall be grateful. I met Frank Donnell through him—dearest of my friends excepting you, Barry."

"Well, then, I walked along the brook and sentimentalised in the dappled sunlight of the yellowing woods. The blue-jays were like winged sapphires everywhere; squirrels made a most prodigious noise among dry leaves. In a hemlock I saw a large owl sitting.

"I took home a huge sheaf of asters. Even in my arms butterflies hovered about the gold and blue blossoms.

"I shall leave here soon. My stepmother and my half-brothers are kind to me. My father, too, in his own way.

"But I shall not come to Whitewater Farms again.

"In spite of kindness, I am not wanted. Finally, I have come to understand that.

"I am not really welcome; I am pleasantly endured. My people have nothing in common with me. It always has been so. I seem to have been born an outsider. I still am. They can't help it; nor can I. There seems to be no bond, no tie, no natural obligation of blood, none of custom, to hold me here. . . . It is a lonely feeling. But it has been mine from earliest recollection.

"Often I used to wonder why I had no intimate affection for this house, for the place—trees, hills, woods.

"I love them—but as one who passes that way often, and becomes fond of a neighbour's house and trees.

"Never have they, in any intimate sense, been mine, or part of me. . . . Not even my old dresses, my few books, my fewer child's toys, have I ever truly considered mine—lacking, perhaps, the love that should have been the gift,—the spirit, Barry—which left me only with the substance—a lonely, lonely child.

"Gradually I have come to realise that, before I came back, harmony reigned at Whitewater Farms. Now, there is the slightest note of discord. I am conscious of it. I know the others are. I understand, now, it was inevitable. . . . I am Eris, daughter of Discord. . . . But for you, Eris and Eros are merged and one. I strike out the i! . . . Forever, Barry. I and i melt into U and you! My eyes, too. Darling! Did you ever suspect such silly wit in me?

"Your attorney writes to me occasionally. He assures me he is speeding the annulment. To me, that brief phase was vaguer than a dream of which one remembers only an indefinable discomfort.

"When it is brushed away forever I shall marry you. If children come I can't go on acting—or only between times. Not even then, because I shan't leave them or you;—or you, Barry—chiefly you. . . . I shall be a good wife and a good mother. . . . And you shall provide our fame.

"And I shall turn lazy, and repose in the shadow of your greatness.

"When our time has come I should like a small house in the country. Would you? A garden? Hills—breezy in spring—and a little brook in the woods—and a cow or two—for the children's sake. Do you mind, darling?

"When I was a young girl I was inclined toward verse. Here is one effusion:

'This is my Prophet's Paradise to come:—
Long grass a-tremble by a little brook,
A hillside where brown bees contented hum,
And I alone there with God's Wonder-book
Wherein I read and ponder, read and pray,
Learning a truer Truth from day to day.'

"Be merciful to a school-girl's rhymes. I've still a book full to show you, dear.

"And now, back to earth: I begin work in a little while, as you know. . . . And I am very fain to have you take me in your arms, Barry. And so shall soon come to you, being inclined that way—yours—yours no less truly now than when the law permits—always your property—your refuge, God willing—your roof, your shelter, your retreat, to hold by right, to enjoy in peace—the girl you found shabby and asleep, and have awakened, clothed in light.

"Gratitude undying; loyalty to you; love.

"Eris."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THAT mental jumping-off place, popularly known as "the psychological moment," is usually hatched out of the dust-pan of Destiny. Materialistic sweepings. And, sometimes spontaneous combustion follows.

Old Lady Destiny, house-cleaning, swept together, from various directions, elements which, uncombined, would not have set the dust-bin afire.

Apropos of Annan and his stories, Coltfoot had made this objection, saying that the literary explosion never seemed to be spontaneous, and charging the author with secreting in the heap a firecracker of commercial manufacture.

Coltfoot, in the absence of Eris, began to frequent Annan. A rudderless ship, a homeless pup, a gasless flivver—these similes haunted him whenever he beheld the quenched features of Barry Annan.

Annan had been candid with him. It was love, he admitted, that knocked every other ambition out of him.

And, at first, Coltfoot thought so, although in his case with Rosalind, love was proving a stimulus to effort amazing, resembling inspiration.

But gradually a disturbing explanation for Annan's idleness forced itself upon Coltfoot. The boy's motive power seemed to be suspended.

Except for the personal pleasure Annan had taken in his mental acrobatics, there never had been anything inspired in his work until he began his latest novel—still merely blocked in.

But this story had in it, carefully and skilfully laid, a deep-bedded foundation of truth. And work on it began

from the day that Eris had promised to become his wife.

Through all the upsetting excitement of the boy's courtship, the inception of the story had produced nothing material.

In the glow of glorious certainty it had flowered under the girl's tender ministry.

In her absence, now, all growth ceased.

It was a disturbing explanation that seemed to force itself upon Coltfoot,—that, in Annan, there was nothing creative except through the vitality of this girl. Or that the living germ was in her; and that Annan was merely the medium for transplantation—adequate soil skilfully mixed for culture of seeds developed in the entity of Eris.

He said one day to Annan: "How far in any creative work Eris would go if she had the chance, I couldn't prophesy. . . . I saw some of the continuity of that last Smull picture she made——"

Annan looked up sharply.

"—It is a noble piece of creative acting," said Coltfoot in a deliberate voice.

After a silence Annan said: "She shall have every chance in the world."

"The trouble is, with such a girl, that she is likely to lend herself to her husband's career. . . . And ignore her own. . . . There is in her a breadth of generosity I have seen very seldom, Barry,—perhaps never before. . . . And she is very much in love."

"Do you suppose I'd accept any such sacrifice, Mike?" demanded Annan impatiently.

"You may have no option. She is a curious girl. Enormously capable. Perfectly normal. Intensely human. . . . She is the balanced type which civilisation is supposed to breed. And seldom does. That is why the ordinary becomes extraordinary; why symmetry is such a rarity. . . .

We're a twisted lot, Barry. We never notice it until we see somebody who not only was born straight, but who has continued to grow that way."

The elements of ignition began to collect in Destiny's dust-pan toward the end of the month.

Camille Armand, Gowns, 57th Street, sent Betsy Blythe an estimate for her personal adornment in the proposed production of a super-picture to be called *The Devil's Own*.

Betsy sent the outrageous estimate to Frank Donnell.

Donnell sent it to Albert Smull.

His partner, Leopold Shill, got hold of it and objected with both hands.

Smull telephoned to Donnell that he'd drop in and discuss cuts in the morning.

A minor accident detained Donnell's suburban train.

Smull arrived at Donnell's office and sat down at Donnell's desk to wait.

Donnell's secretary opened the director's morning mail and laid it on his desk under the ruddy nose of Albert Smull. On top was a telegram to Donnell from Eris, dated from Whitewater, N. Y. Smull read it:

"Arrive Saturday evening, Jane Street. Would love to see you before I begin work. Do call me up after Monday. Best wishes always.

"Eris."

Smull was standing by one of the windows looking out on Broadway when Donnell arrived.

They discussed the estimate Betsy had submitted, came to an economic conclusion, parted.

Smull went down town. But he could not keep his mind on business. He had a row with Shill, was brutal to a stenographer, made enemies of one or two customers, bullied his personal office force, and finally put on his hat and light overcoat and departed, leaving everything in a mess.

At the Patroon's Club that afternoon he saw Annan passing, and saluted him; and was ignored.

This didn't suit him. He turned back, and, coming up alongside of Annan:

"What's the matter?" he asked; "anything wrong, Annan?"

"Yes, *you* are," said the boy.

Smull was still smiling his near-eyed smile, but his sanguine features reddened more heavily.

They had walked as far as the Strangers' Room. There was nobody there, not even a servant.

"What's all this about?" demanded Smull. "I don't get you, Annan——"

"You don't get anybody. That's why your activities are ridiculous and you obnoxious."

Smull's grin became mechanical: "Are you trying to quarrel with me over a skirt who has made monkeys out of both of us——"

Annan hit him hard. He lost his balance, stumbled backward and landed on a leather sofa, seated. His left eye was already puffing up. He seemed too astonished to stir.

Annan went over to the door, locked it, leaving the key there. Then he came back and waited for Smull to get up, which he did after a moment, and began to remove his coat and waistcoat.

"We'll both be expelled," he said coolly, "but it's worth it to me——"

A heavy automatic pistol fell from an inside coat pocket to the carpet.

"That's what I ought to use on you," he remarked; but he picked it up and dropped it into the side pocket of his coat.

Then he turned and was on Annan like a panther. Both fell, smashing a chair; both were on their feet the next second. But Smull's bolt was sped. His face was congested; he was panting already. He had lived too well.

Annan walked toward him, perfectly aware that he could hit him when and where he chose.

But after he had selected the spot he couldn't do it. In fact, there was nothing further to do or say.

He looked into the crimson, disfigured visage, at the two red and swollen fists awaiting attack.

Then, dropping his hands into his pockets, he turned on his heel, walked slowly to the door, let himself out, closed the door quietly behind him.

Smull emerged a little later, stepped into the elevator, and went up to the club barber.

"Charlie," he said, "I got bunged playing squash. Kindly apply the sinking fund process to my left eye."

After an hour's treatment: "I guess that's the best I can do, Mr. Smull," concluded the barber.

Smull inspected himself in the glass: "Hell," he said, "—and I've got a date."

However, he dined early at the club. He maintained sleeping quarters there. Dinner was served in his room. He had a quart of Burgundy to wash down the entrée, and one or two more serious highballs for the remainder of the repast. He was a fastidious feeder, but always a large one. It was that, principally, which played the devil with him. A skin saturated with alcohol completed the muscular atrophy of what had been a magnificent, natural strength in college.

But that was long ago: his sensations had been his gods too long. They had done for him—worse still, they had nearly done *with* him. What remained, principally, was a shameless persistence. Only the man himself knew the tragedy of it. But such men are doomed to go on.

That is their hell.

From the club Smull called up his limousine.

When the doorman announced it, Smull threw aside the

evening paper, took a look at his damaged eye in a mirror, put on hat and overcoat, and went out to where his car stood.

"You know where," he said to his chauffeur, "—and stop somewhere for the evening papers."

A newsboy on 42d Street supplied the papers. Smull continued to read all the way to Jane Street. But when his car drew up along the east curb of Greenwich Avenue, he laid aside the papers and settled back to watch.

Through the early October dusk, illuminated shop windows and street arc-lights shed conflicting rays and shadows over passers-by.

Smull's vision, too, was impaired, and he squinted intently at every taxi, watching for one that would turn into Jane Street.

He could see the front of the house where Eris lived. He could see, also, that her windows were unlighted. It was evident that she had not yet arrived.

He hadn't the least idea what time she would appear. She had said nothing about that in her telegram to Frank Donnell. Her telegram said "Saturday evening," nothing more precise. There was nothing for him to do except to wait.

And now the Old Lady, scraping away vigorously at the four points of the compass, dislodged a bit of rubbish and swept it into her dust-pan with all the rest.

The fragment in question came drifting through Greenwich Avenue in the October night, half revealed in the glow of some humble shop window, lost in the shadow beyond, dimly visible along the dark fringe of an arc-light, fading to a shade again,—a spectre now, and now a ghost-white face adrift in the night.

At the corner of Jane Street the shape stood revealed,—a shabby man, deathly pale, who stood as though he had nowhere else to go—stood with lowered head as though pre-occupied, picking nervously at the raw skin around his finger-nails.

Chance and the Dust Pan dumped him there,—the chance that his wife had returned to Jane Street. He had no knowledge of her coming; did not know where she had been or when she would return. All he knew was that there never were any lights in her windows any more. He had written to her, but she had not replied. And he needed money.

Smull's chauffeur, reposing resignedly at the wheel, straightened up abruptly, then left his seat and came around to the open window of the car.

"That bum is over there on the corner again, Mr. Smull," he said.

"Where?"

"He's in the shadow of that doorway—just south of the corner, sir."

"All right," nodded Smull.

He could now just distinguish a shape there. For some time he watched it, speculating on the affair and still puzzled. For how the girl who had so contemptuously repulsed him could ever have married the derelict across the street, Smull was unable to conjecture.

More perplexing to him still were her relations with Annan. He did not wish to believe they were meretricious. In the muddy depths of him he didn't believe that. But he would not have hesitated to accuse her.

Anyway, it didn't matter. Annan didn't matter, nor did the bum across the way; nor did the girl's intrigues, chaste or otherwise, matter to this man.

He was after his quarry. Perhaps in the muddy depths of him he knew the chase was hopeless. Perhaps he was doomed to hunt anyway—never to rest, never to quit the trail over which he had sped so eagerly, so long ago, after his first quarry.

He had smoked four large cigars and was lighting a fifth. It was ten o'clock. No taxi had turned into Jane Street.

The windows of the house he watched remained unlighted. And, across the street, the shadowy shape had not stirred. Undoubtedly the fellow had recognised Smull's car. Which concerned Smull not a whit.

However, he was growing restless. He had over-smoked, too.

Now he flung away the cigar just lighted, opened the limousine door and got out.

To his chauffeur he said: "That's all. Call up at eight-thirty to-morrow morning."

"That bum is still over there, sir——"

"All right, Harvey. Go back to the garage. . . . And I'll want the coupé to-morrow."

"Very good, sir."

Smull watched the car glide away down Greenwich Avenue, turn east, disappear.

Then he walked across to Jane Street and as far as the house he was watching, and gazed up at her darkened windows.

For half an hour or so he sauntered back and forth between her house and the corner. The night had grown warmer and he loosened his light grey overcoat and threw it back.

Now and then he noticed that the shadowy shape of Carter had not stirred. That did not concern him for a while.

But, as the hour wore on, irritation increased and his nerves became more susceptible to annoyance.

And once, although his contempt for Carter remained supreme, he ran his right hand over the coat pocket where the pistol sagged,—a movement involuntary and quite unconscious.

A little before eleven a taxicab suddenly turned out of Greenwich Avenue and halted before the house in which Eris dwelt.

Smull was prowling some distance to the westward on

the opposite side of the street; and the sudden appearance of the cab caught him unprepared.

He started back instantly; but even before he arrived opposite the house she had entered it, carrying her suitcase.

Her taxicab, however, remained waiting.

Smull gazed up at her windows. Suddenly a light broke out behind the lowered shades.

He looked across at the waiting taxi. He was going to have another chance.

When the light went out behind the yellow shades it would be time enough to cross the street. He thought so. Meanwhile, he would wait. He'd take his time. What's time to a gentleman?

Eris had lighted the apartment, had taken one swiftly comprehensive glance at the dusty solitude about her, then she hurried to the telephone and gave Annan's number. And heard his voice, presently:

“Who is it?”

“*Darling!*”

“Eris! Why on earth did you wire me and neglect to tell me what train to meet?”

“Because I didn't know, dearest. Sometimes the Central waits for the local and sometimes it doesn't. I didn't want you to spend the evening hanging around the Grand Central——”

“You blessed child, I've done it. I've met every train. They told me there were no more from Whitewater. So I came home.”

“*Darling!* I'm fearfully sorry. They were quite right, too. The Central did not wait for the local, so I took a taxi at the station and drove thirty miles to catch an express——”

“Where on earth are you?”

“Home——”

“I'm coming——”

"No! It's dusty and messy and horrid. May I come to Governor's place? I have a taxi—and I'm starved——"

"Jump into that taxi instantly! I'll find Xantippe and have something for you in a few minutes. Will you come at once?"

"I'm on the way, Barry."

She was on the way. But it was the feminine way.

First of all she had a toilet to make, a complete change of clothing to effect. No girl ever lived who would deny herself that much before she braved her lover.

She went to the windows to reassure herself that the shades were properly lowered. Her taxi was both visible and audible below. She noticed nothing else in the street except that it was beginning to rain.

Probably she could not have recognised Smull, even if she had caught sight of him on the opposite side of the way.

There is an old brick building there, untenanted, its shabby façade running westward toward the North River.

Against it Smull stood in darkness.

But already another person had discovered Smull; had recognised him; and now was shuffling slowly along toward him.

The last bit of rubbish in the Dust Pan.

Smull, intent on the lighted windows above, did not notice The Rubbish until it had drifted close to his elbow. Then he turned. It did not suit Smull to have any altercation then or there.

He said in a guarded voice: "Get out of here, you son of a slut!"

"I want to talk to you," said Carter, hoarsely. "I've got to have some money——"

Smull, infinitely annoyed, turned his back and walked westward, turning up the collar of his light overcoat as the drizzle thickened from the River.

He walked a few paces, stood looking back over his left

shoulder at the windows where light shone behind the yellow shades.

Presently he was aware of Carter close behind him. His instinct was to kick him aside; but it was too near the house he was watching and he wanted no outcry or scuffle.

"What do you want, you dirty bum?" he demanded, fumbling in his pocket, "—a dollar for a shell of coke?"

"I want you to keep away from my wife," said Carter in a ghost of a voice.

Smull turned on him savagely. Neither stirred. But it was too close to her house: and Smull, deciding to end the matter quickly, turned once more and walked toward the North River.

When he concluded that he was far enough away in the obscurity he halted, listening for the shuffle of feet.

But Carter came very silently; he was at his elbow again before he heard him. Then, for the first time, the stealthy movements of the man seemed to convey a menace to Smull.

As he confronted Carter he began to unbutton his overcoat, deliberately at first, then more swiftly as he saw the expression in his enemy's eyes.

White as a corpse, Carter said something to him he did not understand as his hand closed on the pistol sagging in his coat pocket.

Then he saw a pistol in Carter's hand; felt a terrific blow in the stomach that knocked him against the brick wall behind him.

As he slid down to a sitting posture, all darkness seemed crashing down around him. And through the rushing chaos he freed his pistol and fired at a grey blur above him,—fired again as sight failed in his dying eyes,—lay very still there in the rain. . . .

Eris, aglow from her shower bath, began to realise it was time to hurry.

In her clothes press she rummaged feverishly, selecting the

freshest of last season's dinner gowns,—an orchid-mauve affair with touches of violet and silver,—very charmingly calculated to enhance her chestnut hair and slender, milk-white beauty.

Now she really must hurry—for the mantel clock had run down weeks ago and her wrist-watch was broken, and she had that deliciously guilty feeling which is entirely and constitutionally feminine—the sensation of being awaited by love impatient and probably adorably out of temper.

To see whether it still was raining she ran to the window. The street seemed to be full of movement and noise—shrill voices, people running, a throng in the rain surging, ebbing, scattering as an ambulance clanged into the street from Greenwich Avenue.

A second's hesitation, then she lowered the shade, ran to her closet for a cloak and umbrella, opened the outer door, switched off every light, and hurried downstairs.

On the steps she opened her umbrella and made her way through the increasing crowd toward the taxicab.

She had no morbid curiosity concerning such painful scenes, when curiosity alone could afford no aid. She heard a ragged boy say something about "a couple guys dead across the street"—and shuddered as she stepped into the taxicab.

The driver turned around and opened the front window: "When I heard that first shot," he said excitedly, "I tuk it f'r a blow-out. Yes, ma'am. Then come two more shots an' I gets wise an' ducks. I hear them two fellas are dead. Some gun-play. I'll say so. . . . Where to, lady?"

CHAPTER XXXV

ONLY in books does the story of an individual begin and end.

But birth cannot begin that story; nor can death end it. Sequel and sequence, continued and continuous, serial in-terminable.

At the autopsy enough coal-tar was discovered in the viscera of Mr. Carter to account for the large orifice he blew in the abdomen of Mr. Smull.

The motive, too, seemed to be clear enough. Smull had been instrumental in sending Carter to prison, where he had become an addict.

Also, Mr. Shill exhibited letters in which Mr. Carter promised to "get" Mr. Smull unless a satisfactory financial arrangement were made for his personal maintenance.

The name of Eris did not appear in the newspapers.

There were black-edged cards tacked to the bulletin boards of several fashionable clubs, announcing the decease of Albert Wesly Smull. Nothing like that for Eddie Carter.

Saint Berold's Chapel indorsed Smull. The music was especially fine. The Crook's Quickstep for Carter; Broadway's roar his requiem.

However, what was left of Eddie, coal-tar and all, went to Evergreen Valley Cemetery in an automobile hearse, chased by one trailer.

A young girl got out of the trailer after the coffin was lowered, the grave filled, and the mound deftly shaped. She laid a bunch of wild blue asters and golden-rod on the mound.

Then, after she had stood motionless for a minute, she

got into the trailer again, where a young man awaited her.

Until their automobile was outside the cemetery neither of them spoke.

Then: "I've been wondering," said Annan, "what is your religion, Eris,—what particular denomination."

"Oh," she said, "I am quite happy in any church. Or, in synagogue or mosque, I should feel no barrier between my mind and God's. . . . Would you?"

He could not say.

Annulment proceedings, not yet begun, never, of course, were.

The status of Eris, its solution and dissolution, had been effected by another solution. Coal-tar. Chemistry had sun-dered the tie which, we are instructed, God alone manufac-tures.

When they arrived at No. 3 Governor's Place, Eris went into the guest room, where, centuries ago, she had lain abed under the roof of a man whose name even she did not know.

"I want to lie down before dinner, Barry. May I?"

"Yes. Can Mrs. Sniffen do anything for you?"

But the girl said no, and turned down the lace spread. So Annan lowered the shades and went out to his study.

At dinner Eris appeared very much herself, smiling, gaily inquisitive concerning Annan's conduct during her recent absence, tenderly diverted to hear how intolerable he had found those few weeks without her. He became emphatic in recollection of his solitary misery.

"Darling, we should not feel that way, ever," she insisted. "Absence should be a stimulus to carry on. Otherwise—" she shrugged, stopped. But he knew she had meant death.

"All right," he said, "but I want to tell you that in that event, I follow. And that's *that!*"

He even borrowed her phrase to fix, irrevocably, their mutual positions. But without that the girl already knew,—

deep, deep within her she had long known,—where the spring of their vital strength had its occult source. And more absolutely, more perfectly the knowledge made this man hers.

Truly there was nothing else in the world for her; no other rival she ever could brook that claimed the mind and strength that she was giving to this man—and must always give as long as mind and strength endured.

There still remained for the career of Eris an autumn, a winter, and a spring in California.

Work was to begin very soon. This knowledge sobered their leave-taking that night.

It tinged all their meetings and leave-takings, a little, during that otherwise perfect week in town.

She wore his betrothal ring when she went away.

Annan stood the separation for a month, then went after her.

During the winter Annan went three times to the Coast. Both, however, thought it best that he should not remain.

Eris made three pictures. Two were the species known as feature pictures; the third a super-picture.

She was paid for her work five hundred dollars a week. She was offered twice as much to sign for another year. Then twice as much again.

To Annan she wrote:

"I had to tell them that circumstances beyond my control might interfere. I meant children, darling, but did not consider it necessary to be more definite."

As for Annan, excepting his brief journeys to the Coast, he passed a miserable, apathetic, unreal winter.

To Coltfoot it was painfully plain where was the true and only source of the boy's inspiration.

Everything else now appeared to be only a sort of native ability polished with usage to cleverness where technical

fluency and journalistic nimbleness in narrative did brilliant duty for the real thing.

For a few days, after being with Eris, enough of her in him lasted so that he could get on with his novel. Then he needed her again. But he realised his necessity only when he had gone on for a while without her.

Dark days came for the boy; incredulity, alarm, chagrin, the struggle renewed, doubt, helplessness, and the subconscious cry for her, never written nor voiced, yet, somehow heard by her at the edge of the other ocean.

Always the occult appeal was answered; always she responded in a passion of tenderness and abnegation—her promise that the days of separation were drawing to their end, that soon she would come to him forever.

She came when May was ending.

He thought she seemed a trifle taller;—had never dreamed she was as lovely a thing;—yet should have been prepared—for always she had been a series of enchanting revelations.

It transpired that she still had a few days left of her career—spots to fill in with “Eastern stuff,” where the continuity called for it—a location here, a set or two to be knocked together, nothing exacting.

Then the professional career of Eris was to be “irised out.”

“Never!” repeated Annan, holding her so that he could see deeply in her grey eyes. And saw a tiny image there, reflected—the miniature of himself.

“Well,” she murmured, “that event is with God, darling. But I don’t think there’s much doubt, because I love children. . . . And anyway——”

She lifted her eyes to her lover, smiled, recognising her destiny.

After dinner that evening, in his study, he sat at his desk with the typed manuscript over which he had agonised all winter.

Eris, perched on the arm of his chair, read it over his shoulder, page after page.

"It seems to be getting on, darling," she ventured.

"Well, I've got to talk it over with you. I *want* it to be the real thing."

"You'll make it so."

He looked up at her. In his eyes there was a sort of tragic curiosity. Her heart seemed to stand still for an instant.

Suddenly he smiled, bent and touched his lips to her betrothal ring.

"*'Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme,'*" he murmured. "And these things are in *you*."

She bent her head close to his: "What do you mean by '*things unattempted*'?"

"Milton's line, Eris, not mine. . . . *'Things unattempted.'* . . . And latent in you. . . . Not within *me*. . . . unless you give them."

Her grey eyes said: "If they truly are in me you have only to take." Her lips tenderly denied such possession, attributing all origin to him.

The boy said: "God knows where it comes from; but it is in me only when you are near."

She rested her cool cheek against his. Her career was paid for.

"One thing," he said with an embarrassed grin, "is likely to annoy you. But I've got to show it to you. You haven't seen to-day's papers, have you?"

"No. . . . Oh, *Barry!*—"

"You bet, sweetheart. It's the announcement of our engagement."

"Darling! How wonderful! And what do you mean by my being annoyed? I authorised you to announce it any time in May it suited you."

"That's it," he admitted. "I was to send the announcement to the papers. But I didn't know how such things

were done so I was ass enough to go to my Aunt about it."

Eris flushed. "Was Mrs. Grandcourt annoyed?"

"I'll tell you what happened. I knew she had just arrived from Bermuda, and I went yesterday afternoon. Well—my aunt is my aunt. We don't get on.

"We went through our semi-yearly financial pow-wow. That's all fixed for the next six months.

"Then she gave me an opening by asking, suspiciously, whether I knew where you were. . . . Did you know she once warned me to keep away from you?"

The colour in Eris' face deepened: "No, I didn't know that."

"The reason," he said airily, "was because she liked and respected you, and considered me a philanderer——"

"Barry!"

"I was."

There ensued a painful pause. Then their eyes met; and he reddened and said in a low voice:

"I haven't anything to ask your pardon for—even mentally."

They both were trembling a little when they kissed.

"—About my aunt," he resumed, the faint grin again apparent; "when she mentioned you I said, 'Oh, by the way, I'm marrying Eris in June. I meant to mention it——'

"Dearest, the extraordinary face my aunt made at me stopped me.

"I think she was too astounded to understand whether she was pleased or not. You see she had got me all wrong, dear. I wasn't the sort she believed.

"One thing was rather extraordinary. Did you suppose my aunt could swear? Well, she can. She swore at me for ten minutes, threatening dire things if I philandered with the granddaughter of Jeanne d'Espremont——"

"Barry!"

"Well, she did. And when finally it filtered through her skull that I was semi-decent, she became very much excited.

. . . You've got to have a very grand church wedding, Eris. Do you mind?"

"Darling! I'd adore it!"

"Well, for heaven's sake— Well, I'm glad you feel that way. Men usually don't, you know. . . . But it's all right—"

"Oh, Barry!" she said in ecstasy, clasping her white hands as unconscious of dramatic effect as when she pleaded with Mr. Quiss on Whitewater Brook.

He said: "My aunt's a snob. Here's the announcement she sent out yesterday afternoon—"

He opened a drawer, took out a dozen clippings. They read them together:

"Mrs. Magnelius Grandcourt announces the engagement of Eris Odell, granddaughter of the late Comtesse Jeanne d'Espremont, of Bayou d'Espremont, Louisiana, to Barry Annan, only son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Grandcourt Annan, of New York.

"Miss Odell is the descendant of one of the oldest Royalist families of France,—her great grandfather coming to this country as a refugee during the Terror of '93. Miss Odell's grandmother, Comtesse Jeanne d'Espremont, and Mrs. Magnelius Grandcourt shared the same room at boarding school in Exmouth, Virginia.

"Miss Odell, who early in childhood evinced unusual artistic proclivities, had chosen the silent drama as a medium for self-expression, and is charmingly known to the artistically fastidious section of the nation's public.

"But after the wedding, which will occur in June, Miss Odell has decided to retire from a career which promises such brilliant fulfilment.

"Mr. Annan served his country in the Great War as Liaison Officer and was decorated for gallantry in action.

"He is an author of repute and promise."

After a silence: "*That's* her work, Eris. I told you she's a snob."

The girl looked at him with a troubled smile: "It's rather too late to do anything except live up to what she says of us—isn't it, Barry?"

"You wonderful girl, you've already lived way beyond anything that anybody says of you."

Her arms went around his neck, tightened:

"*Darling!* . . . But we must make good. . . . You know it."

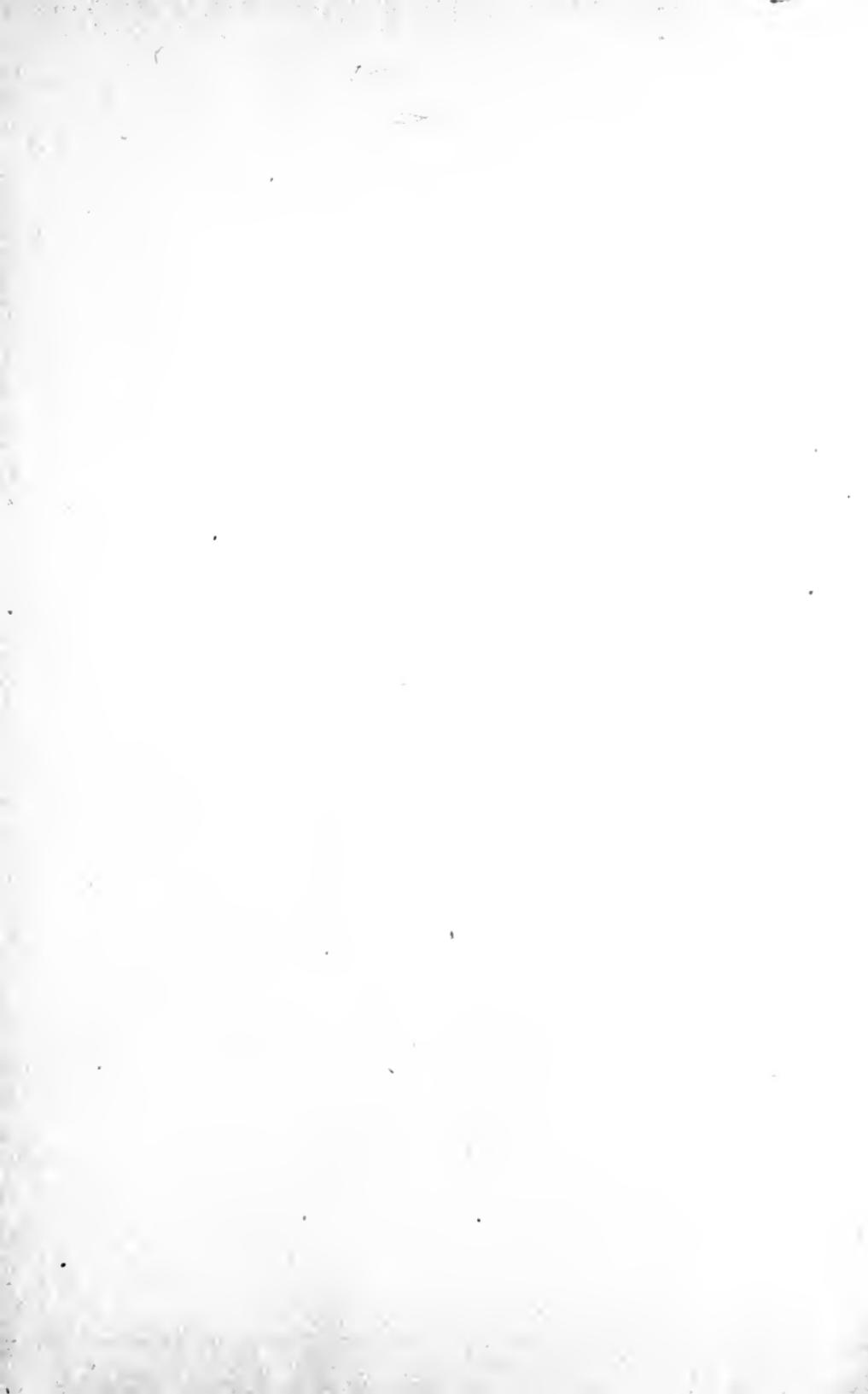
He knew it. He knew that she already had. He rested his head on her breast like a tired boy.

It was up to him.

THE END







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